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WITHDRAWN

THE PILGRIM'S SHELL

: : OR : :

FERGAN THE QUARRYMAN

A Tale from the Feudal Times

—By EUGENE SUE—

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH BY
DANIEL DE LEON

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS COMPANY, 1904

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

In my introduction to "The Silver Cross; or, The Carpenter of Nazareth," I said:

"Eugene Sue wrote in French a monumental work—the *Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family.* It is a 'work of fiction'; yet it is the best universal history extant. Better than any work, avowedly on history, it graphically traces the special features of the several systems of class-rule as they succeeded each other from epoch to epoch, together with the nature of the struggle between the contending classes. The 'Law.' 'Order,' 'Patriotism,' 'Religion,' etc., etc., that each successive tyrant class, despite its change of form, hysterically has sought refuge in in order to justify its criminal existence whenever threatened; the varying economic causes of the oppression of the toilers; the mistakes incurred by these in their struggles for redress; the varying fortunes of the conflict;—all these social dramas are therein reproduced in a majestic series of 'historic novels,' that cover leading and successive episodes in the history of the race."

The present story—*The Pilgrim's Shell; or, Fergan the Quarryman*—is one of that majestic series, among the most majestic of the set, and, with regard to the social period that it describes—its institutions, its classes, its manners, its virtues and its crimes, and the characters that it builds—the most instructive treatise on feudalism, at the very time when the bourgeois or capitalist class was struggling for a foot-hold, and beginning to break through the thick feudal incrustation above. More fully than Molière's plays, and strangely supplemental of the

best passages on the subject in the novels of George Eliot, *The Pilgrim's Shell; or, Fergan the Quarryman* chisels the struggling bourgeois on the feudal groundwork and background, in lines so sharp and true that both the present fully developed and ruling capitalist, inheritor of the feudal attribute of plundering, is seen in the historic ancestor of his class, and his class' refuse, the modern middle class man, is foreshadowed, now also struggling like his prototype of feudal days, to keep his head above water, but, differently from his prototype, who had his future before him, now with his future behind. This double development, inestimable in the comprehension of the tactical laws that the Labor or Socialist Movement demands, stands out clear with the aid of this work.

Eugene Sue has been termed a colorist, the Titian of French literature. It does not detract from his merits, it rather adds thereto, that his brush was also photographic. The leading characters in the story—Fergan, the type of the physically and mentally clean workingman; Bezenecq the Rich, the type of the embryonic bourgeois, visionary, craven and grasping; Martin the Prudent, the type of the "conservative workingman"; the Bishop of Laon, the type of usurping power in the mantle of religion; the seigneur of Plouernel, the type of the ingrain stupidity and prejudices that characterize the class grounded on might; a dazzling procession of women—Joan the Hunchback and Azenor the Pale, Perrette the Ribald and the dame of Haut-Pourcin, Yolande and Simonne, etc.—types of the variations in the form of woman's crucifixion under social systems grounded on class rule; Walter the Pennyless, the type of dispositions too indolent to oppose the wrongs they perceive, and crafty enough to dupe both dupers and duped; Garin, the type of the master's human sleuth—are figures, clad in historic garb, that either hurry or stalk imposingly over the boards, followed by mobs of their respective classes, and presenting a picture that thrills the heart from stage to stage, and leaves upon the mind rich deposits of solid information and crystalline thought.

As a novel, *The Pilgrim's Shell; or, Fergan the Quarryman* pleases, entertains and elevates; as an imparter of historic information and knowledge, it incites to thought and intelligent action. Whether as literature of pleasure or of study, the work deserves the broader field of the Socialist or Labor Movements of the English-speaking world, hereby afforded to it; and inversely, the Socialist or Labor Movements of the English-speaking world, entitled to the best, and none too good, that the Movements in other languages produce, can not but profit by the work, hereby rendered accessible to them.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, January 1, 1904.

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PART I.

THE FEUDAL CASTLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SERFS OF PLOUERNEL.

The day touched its close. The autumn sun cast its last rays upon one of the villages of the seigniory of Plouernel. A large number of partly demolished houses bore testimony to having been recently set on fire during one of the wars, frequent during the eleventh century, between the feudal lords of France. The walls of the huts of the village, built in pisé, or of stones held together with clayish earth, were cracked or blackened by the flames. There were still in sight, half burnt out, the rafters of the roofings, replaced by a few poles wrapped in bundles of furze or reed-grass.

The aspect of the serfs, just returned from the fields, was no less wretched than that of their hovels. Wan, emaciated, barely dressed in rags, they huddled together, trembling and uneasy. The bailiff, justiciary of the seigniory, had just arrived at the village, accompanied with five or six armed men. Presently, to the number of about three hundred, the serfs gathered around him, a fellow so ill disposed towards the poor, that, to his name of Garin, the nick-name "Serf-eater" had been attached. This dreaded man wore a leather casque furnished with ribs of iron, and a coat of goatskin like his shoes. A long sword hung by his side. He was astride a reddish-brown horse, that looked as savage as its master. Men on foot, variously armed, who made up the escort of Garin the Serf-eater, kept watch over several serfs, bound hands and feet, who were brought in prisoners from other localities. Not far from them lay stretched on the ground a wretched fellow, fearfully mutilated, hideous and horrible to behold. His eyes were knocked in, his

feet and hands cut off—a common punishment for rebels. This unfortunate being, hardly covered in rags, the stumps of his arms and legs wrapped in dirty bandages, was waiting for some of his companions in misery, back from the fields, to find time to transport him upon the litter which he shared with the beasts of burden. Blind, and without hands or feet, he found himself thrown upon the charity of his fellows, who now ten years helped him to eat and drink. Other serfs of Normandy and Brittany, had, at the time of the revolt against their lords, been blinded, mutilated like this wretched fellow, and left upon the spot of their punishment to perish in the tortures of hunger.

When the people of the village were gathered on the place, Garin the Serf-eater pulled a parchment out of his pocket and read as follows:

"Witness the order of the very high and very mighty Neroweg VI, lord of the county of Plouernel, by the grace of God. All his serfs and bondsmen, subject to mortmain and taille at his pleasure and mercy, are taxed by the will of the said lord count to pay into his treasury four copper sous per head before the last day of this month at the latest." The serfs, threatened with this fresh exaction, could not restrain their lamentations. Garin the Serf-eater rolled over the assemblage a wrathful eye and proceeded: "If the said sum of four copper pieces per head is not paid before the expiration of the time fixed, it will please the said high and mighty lord Neroweg VI, Count of Plouernel, to cause certain serfs to be seized, and they will be punished, or hanged by his prevost from his seigniorial gibbets. Neither the annual tax, nor the regular dues, is to be lowered in the least by this extraordinary levy of four sous of copper, which is intended to indemnify our said lord for the losses caused by the recent war which his neighbor, the Sire of Castel-Redon, declared against him."

The bailiff descended from his horse to speak to one of the men in his escort. Several serfs muttered to one another: "Where is Fergan? He alone would have the courage to hum-

bly remonstrate with the bailiff that we are wretched, that the taxes, the services, the regular and the extraordinary dues are crushing us, and that it will be impossible for us to pay this tax."

"Fergan must have remained behind in the quarry where he cuts stone," remarked another serf.

Presently, the bailiff continued to read as follows: "Lord Gonthram, eldest son of the very noble, very high and very mighty Neroweg VI, Count of Plouernel, having attained his eighteenth year, and being of knight's age, there shall be paid to him, according to the custom of Plouernel, one denier by each serf and villein of the domain, in honor and to the glory of the knighthood of the said Lord Gonthram. Payment to be made this month."

"Still more!" murmured several of the serfs with bitterness; "it is fortunate that our lord has no daughter, we would some day have to pay taxes in honor of her marriage, as we shall have to pay them in honor of the knighthood of the sons of Neroweg VI. May God have mercy upon us."

"Pay, my God! but wherewith?" interjected another serf in a low voice. "Oh, it is a great pity that Fergan is not around to speak for us."

The bailiff having finished his reading, beckoned to a serf named Peter the Lame. Peter was not lame; but his father, by reason of that infirmity had received the nick-name which his son preserved. He advanced trembling before Garin the Serf-eater. "This is the third Sunday that you have not brought your bread to be baked at the seigniorial oven," said the bailiff; "nevertheless you have eaten bread these three weeks, seeing you are alive."

"Master Garin . . . my misery is such . . ."

"You have had the impudence to have your bread baked under the ashes, you scurvy beggar!"

"Oh, good Master Garin, our village was set on fire and sacked by the men of the Sire of Castel-Redon; the little cloth-

ing that we had has been burnt or pillaged; our cattle stolen or driven off; our crops devastated during the war. Have mercy upon us!"

"I am talking to you about oven and not about war! You owe three deniers oven-dues; you shall pay three more as a fine."

"Six deniers! Poor me! Six deniers! And where do you expect me to find so much money?"

"I know your tricks, knaves that you are! You have hiding places, where you bury your deniers. Will you pay, yes or no, you earth-worm? Answer immediately!"

"We have not one obole . . . the people of the Sire of Castel-Redon have left us only our eyes to weep over our disaster!"

Garin raised his shoulders and made a sign to one of the men in his suite. This one then took from his belt a coil of rope, and approached Peter the Lame. The serf stretched out his hands to the man-at-arms: "Take me prisoner, if it pleases you to, I do not own a single denier. It will be impossible for me to satisfy you."

"That's just what we are about to ascertain," replied the bailiff; and, while one of his men bound the hands of Peter the Lame without his offering the slightest resistance, another took from a pouch suspended from his belt some touch-wood, a tinder-box and a sulphurated wick, which he lighted. Garin the Serf-eater, turning to Peter the Lame, who, at the sight of these preparations began to grow pale, said: "They will place this lighted wick between your two thumbs; if you have a hiding place where you bury your deniers, your pain will make you speak. Go ahead."

The serf answered not a word. His teeth chattered with fear. He fell upon his knees before the bailiff, stretching out to him his two bound hands in supplication. Suddenly a young girl jumped out of the group of the villagers. Her feet were bare, and for only cover she had a coarse skirt on. She was called Pierrine the Goat because, like her sheep, she was savage and

fond of rugged solitudes. Her thick black hair half hid her savage face, burnt by the sun. Approaching the bailiff without lowering her eyes, she said bluntly to him: "I am the daughter of Peter the Lame; if you want to torture someone, leave my father and take me."

"The wick!" impatiently called out Garin the Serf-eater to his men, without either looking at or listening to Pierrine the Goat. "The wick! And hurry up! Night approaches." Peter the Lame, despite his cries, despite the heart-rending entreaties of his daughter, was thrown upon the ground and held down by the men of the bailiff. The torture of the serf was conducted in sight of his companions in misery, who were brutified with terror, and by the habit of serfdom. Peter uttered fearful imprecations; Pierrine the Goat no longer screamed, no longer implored the tormentors of her father. Motionless, pale, sombre, her eyes fixed and drowned with tears, she alternately bit her fists in mute rage, and murmured: "If I only knew where his hiding-place was, I would tell it."

At last, Peter the Lame, vanquished by pain, said to his daughter in a broken voice: "Take the hoe, run to our field; rake up the earth at the foot of the large elm; you will there find nine deniers in a piece of hollow wood." Then, casting upon the bailiff a look of despair, the serf added: "That's my whole treasure, Sire Garin; I'm now ruined!"

"Oh, I was certain that you had a hiding place"; and turning to his men: "Stop the torture; one of you follow this girl and bring back the money. Let her not be lost sight of."

Pierrine the Goat went off quickly, followed by one of the men-at-arms, after having cast upon Garin a furtive and ferocious look. The serfs, terrified, silent, hardly dared to look at one another, while Peter, uttering plaintive moans, despite his punishment having ceased, murmured while he wept hot tears: "Oh, how shall I be able to till the ground with my poor hands wounded and sore!"

Accidentally the bailiff caught sight of the blind serf, mutilated of his four limbs. Pointing at the unhappy being, he cried out in a threatening voice:

"Profit by that example, ye people of the glebe! Behold how they are treated who dare rebel against their lords. Are you, or are you not subject to taille at the pleasure and mercy of your lord?"

"Oh, yes, we are serfs, Master Garin," replied the wretches, "we are serfs at the mercy of our master!"

"Seeing you are serfs, you and your race, why always stingying, cheating and pilfering on the taxes? How often have I not caught you in fraud and at fault. The one sharpens his plowshare without notifying me, that he may purloin the denier due to the seigniory every time he sharpens his sock; the other pretends he is free from the horn-dues under the false claim that he owns no horned cattle; others carry their audacity to the point of marrying in a neighboring seigniory; and so on, any number of enormities! Must you, then, miserable fellows, be reminded that you belong to your lord in life and death, body and goods? Must it be repeated to you that all there is of you belongs to him—the hair on your heads, the nails on your fingers, the skin on your vile carcasses, everything, including the virginity of your daughters?"

"Oh, good Master Garin," an old serf, named by reason of his subtlety, Martin the Prudent, ventured without daring to raise his eyes, "oh, we know it; the priests repeat to us incessantly that we belong, soul, body and goods, to the lords whom the will of God sets over us. But there are those who say . . . oh, it is not we who dare to say aught . . . things contrary to these declarations."

"And who is it dares contradict our holy priests? Give me the name of the infidel, the rashling."

"It is Fergan the Quarryman."

"Where is that knave, that miscreant? Why is he not here among you?"

"He must have remained cutting stone at his quarry," put in a timid voice; "he never quits work until dark."

"And what is it that Fergan the Quarryman says? Let's see how far his audacity goes," replied the bailiff.

"Master Garin," the old serf went on to say, "Fergan recognizes that we are serfs of our lord, that we are compelled to cultivate for his benefit the fields where it has pleased him to settle us forever, us and our children. Fergan says that we are bound to labor, to plant, to gather in the harvests on the lands of the castle, to mount guard at the strongholds of the seigniory and to defend it."

"We know the rights of the seigniory. But what else does Fergan say?"

"Fergan pretends that the taxes imposed upon us increase unceasingly, and that, after having paid our dues in products, the little we can draw from our harvests is insufficient to satisfy the ever new demands of our lord. Oh, dear Master Garin, we drink water, we are clad in rags, for only nourishment we have chestnuts, berries, and, when in luck, a little bread of barley or oats."

"What!" exclaimed the bailiff in a threatening voice, "you have all the good things, and yet you dare complain!"

"No, no, Master Garin," replied the frightened serfs; "no, we do not complain! We are on the road to Paradise!"

"If, occasionally, we suffer a little, it is all the better for our salvation, as the parish priest tells us. We shall enjoy the pleasures of the next world."

"We do not complain. It is only Fergan who spoke that way the other day. We listened to him, but without approving his words."

"And we even found great fault with him for holding such language," added old Martin the Prudent, all in a tremble. "We are satisfied with our lot. We venerate, we love our lord, Neroweg VI, and also his helpful bailiff, Garin. May God preserve them long."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the serfs in chorus, "that's the truth, the pure truth!"

"Vile slaves!" roared the bailiff in a rage mixed with disdain, "cowardly knaves! You basely lick the hand that scourges you. Don't I know that, among yourselves, you call the noble Lord Neroweg VI 'Worse than a Wolf,' and me, his helpful bailiff, 'Serf-eater!' These are our nick-names."

"Upon our eternal salvation, Master Garin, it is not we who have given you that nick-name, Master Garin."

"By my beard! We propose to deserve our surnames. Yes, Neroweg VI will be 'worse than a wolf' to you, you pack of idlers, thieves and traitors! And, as for me, I will eat you to the bone, villeins or serfs, if you try to cheat your lord of his rights. As to Fergan, that smooth talker, I'll come across him some other day, and I feel it in my bones that he will yet make acquaintance with the gibbet of the seigniory of Plouernel. He will be hanged high and dry!"

"And we will not pity him, dear and good Master Garin. Let Fergan be accursed, if he has dared to speak ill of you and of our venerated lord!" answered the frightened serfs.

At this moment, Pierrine the Goat returned, accompanied by the man-at-arms, who had been charged by the bailiff to disinter the treasure of Peter the Lame. The young serf had a somberer and wilder look, her tears had dried, but her eyes shot lightning. Twice she threw her thick black hair back from her forehead with her left hand, as she held her right hand behind her. She drew nearer to the bailiff step by step, while the man-at-arms, delivering to Garin a round piece of hollow wood, said: "It contains nine copper deniers, but four of them are not of the mintage of our Lord Neroweg VI."

"Foreign coin in the seigniory! And yet I have forbidden you to accept any under penalty of the whip!"

"Oh, Master Garin," explained Peter the Lame, still lying on the ground, and crying at the sight of his lacerated hands, "the foreign merchants who pass, and who occasionally buy a

pig, a calf or a sheep, frequently have none but coin minted in other seigniories. What are we to do? If we refuse to sell the little we have, where are we to find the money to pay the taxes with?"

The bailiff placed the deniers of Peter the Lame in a large leather pouch, and answered the serf: "You owe six deniers; among these nine pieces there are four of foreign coinage; I confiscate them. There remain five deniers of this seigniory. I take them on account. You will give me the sixth when you pay the next taxes. If you don't, look out!"

"I propose to pay now!" shrieked Pierrine the Goat, striking the bailiff full in the face with a large stone that she had picked up on the road. Garin lost his balance with the violence of the blow, and the blood ran down his face; but he promptly recovered from the shock, and, rushing furiously upon the young serf, threw her down, trampled her under foot, and, half drawing his sword, was on the point of despatching her, when, recollecting himself, he said to his men: "Bind her fast; take her to the castle; her eyes will be put out to-night; and, at dawn to-morrow, she shall be hanged from the patibulary forks."

"The punishment of Pierrine the Goat will be well merited," exclaimed the serfs, hoping to turn away from themselves the wrath of Garin the Serf-eater. "Bad luck to the accursed girl! She has spilled the blood of the good bailiff of our glorious seigneur! Let her be punished as she deserves!"

"You are a set of cowards!" cried Pierrine the Goat, her face and breast bruised and bleeding from the blows that Garin had given her while trampling on her. Then, turning to Peter the Lame, who was sobbing but dared not defend his daughter, or raise his voice to implore mercy for her, she said: "Adieu; to-morrow you will see ravens circling on the side of the seigniorial gibbet; they will be the living shroud of your daughter"; and showing her fists to the dismayed serfs, she went on: "Cowards! you are three hundred, and you are afraid of six men-at-arms! There is among you all but one man truly brave; that's Fergan!"

"Oh!" yelled the bailiff, exasperated by the bold words of Pierrine the Goat, and staunching the blood that flowed from his face, "if I meet that Fergan on my route, he shall be your gibbet mate, the infamous blasphemer!" With that, Garin the Serf-eater remounted, and followed by his men, together with the serfs whom he had arrested, Pierrine the Goat among them, was soon lost to sight, leaving the inhabitants of the village struck with such terror, that on that evening they forgot to carry away the poor blind and mutilated old man, who was left to spend the night in the open.

CHAPTER II.

FERGAN THE QUARRYMAN.

It was long after the bailiff had led away his prisoners. The night grew rapidly darker. A young woman, pale, lean and deformed, clad in a tattered smock, her feet bare, her head half covered with a hood from which her hair escaped, held her face hidden in her hands, as she sat on a stone near the hearth of the hut which Fergan inhabited at the extremity of the village. A few chips of brush-wood were burning in the fire-place. Above rose the blackened walls, cracked by the recent conflagration; bunches of brush fastened on poles replaced the roof, through which here and there some brilliant star could be seen. A litter of straw in the best protected corner of the hovel, a trunk, a few wooden vessels—such was the furnishing of the home of a serf. The young woman, seated near the fire-place, was the wife of Fergan, Joan the Hunchback. Her forehead in her hands, crouching upon the stone which served her as a seat, Joan remained motionless. Only at intervals a slight tremor of the shoulders announced that she wept. A man entered the hut. It was Fergan the Quarryman. Thirty years of age, robust and large of frame, his dress consisted of a goat-skin kilt, of which the hair was almost worn off; his shabby hose left his legs and feet bare; on his shoulder he carried an iron pick and the heavy hammer which he used to break and extract the stones from the quarry. Joan the Hunchback raised her head at the sight of her husband. Although homely, her suffering and timid figure breathed an angelic kindness. Advancing quickly towards Fergan, her face bathed in tears, Joan said to him with an

inexpressible mixture of hope and anxiety, while she interrogated him with her eyes: "Have you learned anything?"

"Nothing," answered the serf in despair, throwing down his pick and hammer; "nothing, nothing!"

Joan fell back upon the stone sobbing. She raised her hands to heaven and murmured: "I shall never again see Colombaik! My poor child is lost for ever!"

Fergan, no less distressed than his wife, sat down on another stone placed near the fire-place, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands. Thus he remained for a long spell, gloomy, silent. Suddenly rising, he started to walk uneasily, muttering in a muffled voice: "That cannot remain so—I shall go—Yes, I shall! I must find him!"

Joan, hearing the serf repeat: "I shall go! I shall go!" raised her head, wiped her tears with the back of her hand and asked: "Where is it you want to go?"

"To the castle!" roared the serf, continuing his agitated walk, his arms crossed over his chest. Trembling from head to foot, Joan clasped her hands, and tried to speak. In her terror, she could not at first utter a word; her teeth chattered. At last she said in a faint voice: "Fergan—you must have lost your wits when you say you will go to the castle."

"I shall go after the moon has set."

"Oh! I have lost my poor child," rejoined Joan moaning, "I am going to lose my husband also." She moaned again. The imprecations and the foot-falls of the serf alone interrupted the silence of the night. The fire went out in the fire-place, but the moon, just risen, threw her pale rays into the interior of the hut through the open spaces left by the pole and bunches of brush that took the place of the burnt-out roof. The silence lasted long. Joan the Hunchback taking courage anew, resumed in an accent that was almost confident: "You propose to go to-night—to the castle—fortunately that's impossible." And seeing that the serf did not intermit his silent walk, Joan took his hand as he moved toward her: "Why do you not answer? That frightens

me." He roughly withdrew his hand, and thrusting his wife back, exclaimed in an irritated voice: "Leave me alone, woman, leave me alone."

The feeble creature fell down a few steps beyond among some rubbish, and her head having struck against a piece of wood, she could not hold back a cry of pain. Fergan walked back, and by the light of the moon he saw Joan rising painfully. He ran to her, helped her to sit down on one of the stones of the fire-place, and asked anxiously: "Did you hurt yourself falling?"

"No, no, my dear husband."

"My poor Joan!" exclaimed the serf alarmed, having placed one of his hands on the forehead of his wife, "you bleed!"

"I have been weeping," she replied sweetly, staunching her wound with a lock of her long disheveled hair.

"You suffer? Answer me, dear wife!"

"No, no, I fell because I am feeble," answered Joan with her angelic mildness; "let's not think about that," and she added, smiling sadly and alluding to her deformity, "I need not fear being made ugly by a scar."

Fergan imagined that Joan the Hunchback meant he would have treated her with less rudeness if she had been handsome, and he felt deeply grieved. In a tone of kind reproach he replied: "Apart from the hastiness of my temper, have I not always treated you as the best of wives?"

"That's true, my dear Fergan, and my gratitude is great."

"Have I not freely taken you for wife?"

"Yes, notwithstanding you could have chosen from the serfs of the seigniory a companion who would not have been deformed."

"Joan," replied the quarryman with sad bitterness, "if your countenance had been as beautiful as your heart is good, whose would have been the first night of our wedding? Would it not have belonged to Neroweg 'Worse than a Wolf,' or to one of his whelps?"

"Oh, Fergan, my ugliness saved us this supreme shame."

"The wife of Sylvest, one of my ancestors, a poor slave of the Romans, also escaped dishonor by disfiguring herself," was the thought that flashed through the quarryman's mind while he sighed, and pondered: "Oh, slavery and serfdom weigh upon our race for centuries. Will the day of deliverance, predicted by Victoria the Great,[1] ever come."

Joan, seeing her husband plunged in meditation, said to him: "Fergan, do you remember what Pierrine the Goat told us three days ago on the subject of our son? She had, as was her custom, led her sheep to the steepest heights of the great ravine, whence she saw one of the knights of the Count of Plouernel rush on a gallop out of a copse where our little Colombaik had gone to gather some dead wood. Pierrine was of the opinion that that knight carried off our child under his cloak."

"The suspicions of Pierrine were well founded."

"Good God! What is it you say?"

"A few hours ago, while I was at the quarry, several serfs, engaged in repairing the road of the castle which was partly destroyed during the last war, came for stone. For the last three days I have been like crazy. I have been telling everybody of the disappearance of Colombaik. I spoke about it to these serfs. One of them claimed to have seen the other evening, shortly before nightfall, a knight holding on his horse a child about seven or eight years, with blonde hair—"

"Unhappy we! That was Colombaik."

"The knight then climbed the hill that leads to the manor of Plouernel, and went in."

"But what can they do to our child?"

"What will they do!" exclaimed the serf shivering, "they'll strangle him, and use his blood for some infernal philter. There is a sorceress stopping at the castle."

Joan uttered a cry of fright, but rage swiftly followed upon her fright. Delirious and running to the door she cried out:

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[1] A Gallic heroine of the sec ond century.

"Fergan, let's go to the manor—we shall enter even if we have to tear up the stones with our nails—I shall have my child—the sorceress shall not throttle him—no! no!" The serf, holding her by the arm, drew her back. Almost immediately she fainted away in his arms. Still, in a muffled voice, the poor woman muttered: "It seems to me I see him die—if my heart were torn in a vice I could not suffer more—it is too late—the sorceress will have strangled the child—no—who knows!" Presently seizing her husband by the hand, "You meant to go to the castle—come—come!"

"I shall go alone when the moon is down."

"Oh, we are crazy, my poor man! Pain leads us astray. How can one penetrate into the lair of the count?"

"By a secret entrance."

"And who has informed you of it?"

"My grandfather Den-Brao accompanied his father Yvon the Forester in Anjou during the great famine in 1033. Den-Brao, a skillful mason, after having worked for more than a year in the castle of a lord of Anjou became his serf, and was exchanged by his master for an armorer of Neroweg IV, an ancestor of the present lord. My grandfather, now a serf of the lord of Plouernel, was engaged in the construction of a donjon which was attached to the castle. The work lasted many a year. My father, Nominoe, almost a child at the commencement of the structure, had grown to manhood when it was finished. He helped his father in his work, and became a mason himself. After his day's work, my grandfather used to trace upon a parchment the plan of the several parts of the donjon which he was to execute. One day my father asked him the explanation of certain structures, the purpose of which he could not understand. 'These separate stone works, connected by the work of the carpenter and the blacksmith,' answered my grandfather, 'will constitute a secret staircase made through the thick of the wall of the donjon, and it will ascend from the lowest depth of this edifice to the top, while it furnishes access to several

reducts otherwise invisible. Thanks to this secret issue, the Lord of Plouernel, if besieged in his castle, and unable to resist his enemies, will be able to escape, and reach a long subterraneous gallery which comes out at the rocks that stretch to the north, at the foot of the mountain, where the seigniorial manor-house rises.' Indeed, Joan, during those days of continual wars, similar works were executed in all the strongholds: their owners always looked to preserving the means of escape from their enemies. About six months before the completion of the donjon, and when all that was left to do was the construction of the staircase and the secret issue, traced upon the plan of my grandfather, my father broke both of his legs by the fall of an enormous stone. That grave accident became the cause of a great piece of good fortune."

"What say you, Fergan!"

"My father remained here, at this hovel, unable to work by reason of his wounds. During that interval the donjon was finished. But the artisan serfs, instead of returning every evening to their respective villages, no longer left the castle. The seigneur of Plouernel wished, so it was said, to hasten the completion of the works and to save the time lost in the morning and evening by the traveling of the serfs. For about six months the people of the plain saw the movement of the workingmen gathered upon the last courses of the donjon, which rose ever higher. After that, when the platform and the turrets which crown it were finished, nothing more was seen. The serfs never re-appeared in their villages, and their bereaved families are still awaiting them."

"What became of them?"

"Neroweg IV, fearing they might reveal the secret issue constructed by themselves, had them locked up in the subterraneous place, that I stated to you. It is there that my grandfather, together with his fellow workingmen, twenty-seven in number, perished, a prey to the tortures of hunger."

"That's horrible! What barbarity!"

"Yes, it is horrible! My father, kept at home by his injuries, alone escaped this fearful death, overlooked, no doubt, by the seigneur of Plouernel. Trying to fathom the mystery of my grandfather's disappearance, my father recalled the information he had received from his father on the plan of the donjon and its secret issue. One night, accordingly, my father betook himself to that secluded spot, and succeeded in discovering an air-hole concealed amid brushwood. He slid down this opening, and after walking long in a narrow gallery, he was arrested by an enormous iron grating. Seeking to break it, he passed his arm through the bars. His hand touched a mass of bones—human bones and skulls—"

"Good God! Poor victims!"

"It was the bones of the serfs, who, locked up in this subterraneous passage with my grandfather, had died of hunger. My father did not try to penetrate further. Certain of the fate of my grandfather, but lacking the energy to avenge him, he made to me this revelation on his death-bed. I went—it is a long time ago—to inspect the rocks. I discovered the subterraneous issue. Through it, to-night, will I enter the donjon and look for our child."

"Fergan, I shall not try to oppose your plan," observed Joan after a moment of silence and suppressing her apprehensions; "but how will you clear that grating which prevented your father from entering the underground passage? Is it not above your strength?"

"That grating has been fastened in the rock, it can be unfastened with my iron pick and hammer. I have the requisite strength for that job."

"Once in the passage, what will you do?"

"Last evening I took from the wooden casket, hidden yonder under the rubbish, a few strips of the parchment where Den-Brao had traced the plan of the buildings; I have posted myself on the localities. The secret gallery, in its ascent towards the castle, comes out, on the other side of the donjon, upon a secret stair-

case built in the thick of the wall. That leads, from the lowest of the three rows of subterranean dungeons, up to the turret that rises to the north of the platform."

"The turret," queried Joan, growing pale, "the turret, whence occasionally strange lights issue at night?"

"It is there that Azenor the Pale, the sorceress of Neroweg, carries on her witchcraft," answered the quarryman in a hollow voice. "It is in that turret that Colombaik must be, provided he still lives. It is there I shall go in search of our child."

"Oh, my poor man," murmured Joan, "I faint at the thought of the perils you are about to face!"

"Joan," suddenly interjected the serf, raising his hands towards the starry sky, visible through rifts in the roof, "before an hour the moon will have set; I must go now."

The quarryman's wife, after making a superhuman effort to overcome her terror, said in a voice that was almost firm: "I do not ask to accompany you, Fergan; I might be an encumbrance in this enterprise. But I believe, as you do, that at all costs we must try to save our child. If in three days you are not back—"

"It will mean that I have encountered death in the castle of Plouernel."

"I shall not be behind you a day, my dear husband. Have you weapons to defend yourself?"

"I have my iron pick and my hammer."

"And bread? You must have some provisions."

"I have still a big piece of bread in my wallet; you will fill my gourd with water; that will suffice me,"

While his wife was attending to these charges, the serf provided himself with a long rope which he wound around him; he also placed a tinder-box in his wallet, a piece of punk, and a wick, steeped in resin, of the kind that quarrymen use to light their underground passages. These preparations being ended, Fergan silently stretched his arms towards his wife. The brave and sweet creature threw herself into them. The couple pro-

longed this painful embrace a few moments, as if it were a last adieu. The serf then, swinging his heavy hammer on his shoulder and taking up his iron pick, started towards the rocks where the secret issue of the seigniorial manor ran out.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE CROSS-ROAD.

The day after Fergan the Quarryman decided to penetrate into the castle of Plouernel, a considerable troop of travelers, men of all conditions, who had left Nantes the day before, were journeying towards the frontier of Anjou. Among them were found pilgrims, distinguishable by the cockle-shell attached to their clothes, vagabonds, beggars, peddlers loaded with their bundles of goods. Among the latter a man of tall stature, with light blonde hair and beard, carried on his back a bundle surmounted with a cross and covered with coarse pictures representing human bones, such as skulls, thighs, arms, and fingers. This man, named Harold the Norman, devoted himself, like many other descendants of the pirates of old Rolf,[1] to the trade of relics, selling to the faithful the bones which they stole at night from the seigniorial gibbets. By the sides of Harold marched two monks, who called each other Simon and Jeronimo. The cowl of the frock of Simon was pulled over his head and completely concealed his face; but that of Jeronimo, thrown back over his shoulder, exposed the monk's dark and lean visage, whose thick eye-brows, as black as his beard, imparted to it a savage hardness.

A few steps behind these priests, mounted on a fine white mule, of well-fed form and skin sleek and shining like silver, came a merchant of Nantes, named from his great wealth, Bezenecq the Rich. Still in the vigor of years, of open, intelligent and affable mien, he wore a hood of black felt, a robe of fine blue cloth, gathered around his waist by a leathern belt, from which hung an embroidered purse. Behind him, and on

[1] A Norse chieftain who led a piratical invasion of France in the eighth century, and was pacified with the fief of Normandy where he and his followers in arms settled.

a part of the saddle contrived for such service, rode his daughter Isoline, a lass of about eighteen years, with blue eyes, brown hair, white teeth and a face like a rose of May, as pretty as she was attractive. Isoline's long pearl-grey robe hid her little feet; her traveling cloak, made of a soft green fabric, enveloped her elegant and supple waist; under the hood of the mantle, lined in red, her fresh visage was partially seen. The feelings of tender solicitude between father and daughter could be divined by the looks and smiles of affection that they often exchanged, as well as by the little attentions that they frequently bestowed upon each other. The serenity of unalloyed happiness, the sweet pleasures of the heart, could be read upon their visages, which bore the impress of radiant bliss. A well-clad servant, alert and vigorous, led on foot a second mule, loaded with the baggage of the merchant. On either side of the saddle hung a sword in its scabbard. In those days, one never traveled unarmed. Bezenecq the Rich had conformed to the usage, although that good and worthy townsman was of a nature little given to strife.

The travelers had arrived at a cross-road where the highway of Nantes to Angers forked off. At the juncture of the two roads there rose a seigniorial gibbet, symbol and speaking proof of the supreme jurisdiction exercised by the lords in their domains. That massive pile of stones bore at its top four iron forks fastened at right angles, gibbet-shaped. From the gibbet that rose over the western branch of the road three corpses hung by the neck. The first was reduced to the condition of a skeleton; the second was half putrified. The crows, disturbed in their bloody quarry by the approach of the travelers, still circled in the air over the third corpse, that of a young girl, completely stripped, without even the shred of a rag. It was the body of Pierrine the Goat, tortured and executed in the early morning of that day, as threatened by Garin the Serf-eater. The thick black hair of the victim fell over her face, pinched with agony and furrowed with long traces of clotted blood that had flowed

from her eyeless sockets. Her teeth still held a little wax figure, two or three inches long, clad in a bishop's gown with a miniature mitre on its head, made out of a bit of gold foil. The witches, to carry out their diabolical incantations, often had several of these little figures placed between the teeth of the hanged at the moment when they expired. They called this magic "spell throwing." Beside this gibbet rose the seigniorial post of Neroweg VI, lord and count of the lands of Plouernel. The post indicated the boundaries of the domain traversed by the western road, and was surmounted by a red escutcheon, in the middle of which were seen three eagle's talons painted in yellow—the device of the Nerowegs. Another post, bearing for emblem a dragon-serpent of green color painted on a white background, marked the eastern route which traversed the domains of Draco, Lord of Castel-Redon, and flanked another gibbet with four patibulary forks. Of these only two were furnished; from one hanged the corpse of a child of fourteen years at the most, from the other the corpse of an old man, both half pecked away by the crows. Isoline, the daughter of Bezenecq the Rich, uttered a cry of horror at the sight of these bodies, and huddling close to the merchant, behind whom she was on horseback, whispered in a low voice: "Father! oh, father! Look at those bodies. It's a horrible spectacle!"

"Look not in that direction, my child," answered sadly the townsman of Nantes, turning around to his daughter. "More than once on our road shall we make these mournful encounters. The patibulary forks are found on the confines of every seigniorial estate. Often even the trees are decked out with hanging bodies!"

"Oh, father," replied Isoline, whose face, so full of smiles a minute before, had painfully saddened, "I fear this encounter may be of sad omen to our voyage!"

"Beloved daughter," the merchant put in with suppressed agony, "be not so quick to take alarm. No doubt we live in days when it is impossible to leave the city and undertake a

long trip with safety. It is that that kept me from paying a visit in the city of Laon to my good brother Gildas, whom I have not seen for many years. It is unfortunately a long way to Picardy, and I have not dared to venture on such a ride. But our trip will hardly take two days. We should not apprehend a sad issue to this visit to your grandmother, who wishes to see and embrace you before she dies. Your presence will sweeten her sorrow at the loss of your mother, whom she mourns as grieviously to-day as when my beloved wife was taken from me. Pick up courage and calm your mind, my child."

"I shall pick up courage, father, as you wish. I shall surmount my idle terrors and my childish fears."

"Were it not for the imperious duty that made us undertake this journey, I would say to you: 'Let's return to our peaceful home in Nantes, where you are happy and gay from morning to evening.' If your smile cheers my soul," Bezenecq added in a voice deeply moved, "every tear you drop falls upon my heart!"

"Behold me," said Isoline. "Would you say I look apprehensive, alarmed?" And saying this she pressed against the merchant her charming face, that had recovered its serenity and confidence. The townsman contemplated for a moment in silence the beloved features of his daughter. A tear of joy then gathered in his eye, and endeavoring to subdue his emotion, he cried out: "The devil take these crupper saddles! They prevent one even from embracing his own child with ease!" Whereupon the young girl, with a movement full of gracefulness, threw her arms on her father's shoulders, and drew her rosy face so close to Bezenecq's that he had but to turn his head to kiss the lassie on her forehead and cheeks, which he did repeatedly with ineffable happiness.

During this tender exchange of words and carresses between the merchant and his daughter, the other travelers, before proceeding upon either of the two routes that opened before them, had gathered in the middle of the crossing to consider which to take. Both roads led to Angers. One of them, that marked

by the post surmounted with a serpent-dragon, after making a wide circuit, traversed a sombre forest; it was twice as long as the other. Each of the two roads having its own advantages and disadvantages, several of the travelers insisted upon the road of the post with the three eagle's talons. Simon, the monk whose face was almost wholly concealed under his cowl, strove, on the contrary, to induce his companions to take the other road. "Dear brothers! I conjure you;" cried Simon, "believe me . . . do not cross the territory of the seigneur of Plouernel . . . He has been nick-named 'Worse than a Wolf,' and the reprobate but too well justifies the name. . . . Every day stories are heard of travelers whom he arrests and plunders while crossing his grounds."

"My dear brother," put in a townsman, "I can testify, like you, that the keeper of Plouernel is a wicked man, and his donjon a terrible donjon. More than once from the ramparts of our city of Nantes have we seen the men of the Count of Plouernel, bandits of the worst stripe, pillage, burn, and ravage the territory of our bishop, with whom Neroweg was at war over the possession of the ancient abbey of Meriadek."

"Is that the abbey where the prodigious miracle of about four hundred years ago happened?" inquired another bourgeois. "Saint Meroflede, abbess of the monastery, summoned by the soldiers of Charles Martel to surrender the place, invoked heaven, and the miscreants, overwhelmed by a shower of stones and fire, were asphyxiated in the fumes of burning sulphur and pitch, whither they were dragged by horned, clawed and hairy demons, frightful to behold. And so it happened that the venerable abbess died in the odor of sanctity."

"An ineffable odor that has lasted down to our own days. The common people entertain a particular devotion for the chapel of Saint Meroflede, which has been raised on the borders of a large lake, close by the very place where the miracle was accomplished."

"The chapel is never empty of the faithful. The offerings

furnish a large revenue to the incumbent. As the abbess was of the house of the Nerowegs, the seigneur of Plouernel laid claim to, and sought to reacquire the property of the chapel. Hence the wars between the count and the Bishop of Nantes. Those were fearful wars, my friends. They happened at the season when the bishop was marrying his last daughter, whom he gave for a dower the benefice of Saint Paterne. It was a beautiful wedding. The wife and the daughter of his grace the bishop were beautifully ornamented. The young bride wore a necklace of inestimable value."

The moment the name of the Bishop of Nantes was mentioned, Simon the monk pulled down the cowl of his cloak, trying to hide his face completely.

"Sure enough, my beloved companions," interjected another townsman, "we know that the Sieur 'Worse than a Wolf' is a brigand. But do you imagine that the Sieur Draco, seigneur of Castel-Redon, is a lamb? It is as perilous to cross the territory of the one as of the other, and yet there is no other way out. The road to the east, barred by a river, run out upon a bridge that is guarded by the men of the seigneur of Castel-Redon; the road to the west, bordered by vast swamps, runs out upon a path guarded by the men of the seigneur of Plouernel. By taking the shorter of the two routes we reduce by one-half the chances of danger."

"This worthy man is right," said several voices. "Let's follow his advice."

"Dear brothers, look out what you do!" cried Simon the monk. "The seigneur of Plouernel is a monster of ferocity. He is given up to sorcery with a female magician, his concubine. . . a Jewess! He stands excommunicated; he is a pagan."

"To the devil with the Jews!" exclaimed Harold the Norman, merchant of relics. "The Jews have all been hanged, burned, drowned, strangled, quartered, when they were hunted down in all the provinces, like wild beasts. There can not be one of them left alive in our land of Gaul."

"Since the execution of the Orleans heretics, who perished by fire," resumed the monk Jeronimo, "never was an extermination of unclean animals more meritorious than that of those accursed Jews, who instigated the Saracens of Palestine to destroy the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem. Death to the Jews!"

"What say you, dear brother?" inquired a townsman. "Did the Jews of this land of Gaul instigate the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem?"

"Yes, my brother. The abominable mischiefs of those Jews defy time and space. But patience! Soon will the day come when, by divine will, no longer will it be isolated pilgrims that will travel to Jerusalem to there mourn and pray at the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will be Christianity in mass that will march under arms to the Holy Land, in order to exterminate the infidels and deliver the sepulchre of the Saviour of the world from their sacriligious presence. Death to all miscreants!"

Bezenecq the Rich, who had just approached the group of debating travelers, and ascertained the subject of their discussion, apprehensive lest his daughter take new alarm, suggested: "Meseems we had better take the shorter route. As to your fears, they are exaggerated. When we shall have paid the toll-collectors of the seigneur of Plouernel for the right to travel over his roads and cross his burgs and villages, what else can he demand of us? We are neither his serfs nor his villeins.'

"Can you, a grey beard, talk like that?" interjected Simon the monk. "Do you imagine these devilish seigneurs care aught for justice or injustice?"

"But I do care a deal about that!" replied Bezenecq the Rich. "If the seigneur of Plouernel should do me violence, me a bourgeois of Nantes, I would appeal to William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, of whom the seigneur of Plouernel stands seized, the same as William IX holds of Philip I, King of the Franks. Each of these seigneurs has his suzerain."

"Which would be like appealing from the wolf to the tiger," replied Simon, shrugging his shoulders. "You can not know William, Duke of Aquitaine. That sacriligious criminal sought to force Peter, the Bishop of Poitiers, to give him absolution for his crimes by putting a dagger to his throat. William abducted Malborgiane, the wife of the Viscount of Castellerault, a shameless creature, whose picture he dares to carry painted on his shield. William had the effrontery to answer Gerard, the Bishop of Angouleme, who reproached him with this new act of adultery: 'Bishop, I shall return Malborgiane when you frizzle your hair!' The prelate was bald. Such is the man to whom you would appeal from the violent acts of the seigneur of Plouernel."

"That William is certainly a deep-dyed criminal;" put in Jeronimo, "but that much justice must be done him that he approved himself the most implacable exterminator of the Jews. Not one of those who lived on his domains escaped death!"

"It is said that the mere sight of a Jew makes him pale with horror; and that, libertine though he is, a Jewess, be she never such a beauty, be she a maid like the Virgin Mary, would make him run away from her."

"But that does not prevent," insisted Simon the monk, "that if you rely upon the Duke of Aquitaine for redress against the seigneur of Plouernel, you will be acting like a lunatic. On that subject your judgment is at fault."

"If William IX does not do us justice," rejoined Bezenecq the Rich, "we shall appeal to King Philip. Oh! oh! we townsmen do not allow ourselves to be tyrannized without protest! We know how to draw up a petition!"

"And what will King Philip care for your petition? That Sardanapalus! that glutton! that idler! that double adulterer! and what's worse, that dullard, whom the seigneurs, his large vassals, laugh at openly! It is to him you will go for justice, if refused by the Duke of Aquitaine? Moreover, even if the latter were so inclined, as the suzerain of the seigneur of Plouernel, to

punish him for wrongs done to you, would he have the power?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed Bezenecq. "He would enter the domain of the seigneur of Plouernel and besiege him in his castle."

Simon the monk shook his head sadly. "The seigneurs reserve their forces to round up their domains and to revenge their own wrongs. Never do they protect the cause of small folks, however just it be."

"We live, I know, in sad times; nor were the previous centuries much better," observed the townsman with a sigh, casting an uneasy look upon his daughter, who seemed again alarmed. "All the same, we should not exaggerate to ourselves the dangers of the situation. We have to choose between the two routes. Let's suppose the dangers of crossing them are equal. Common sense bids us to take the shorter, and that we hurry our steps."

"The shorter route is the more perilous," repeated Simon the monk, who, more than anyone else, seemed to dread crossing the territory of the seigneur of Plouernel.

"Oh! father," asked Isoline of the merchant, "have we really so many dangers to fear?"

"No, no, my dear child. That poor monk's mind is upset with fear."

The Norman dealer in relics, having overheard the last words of Isoline, approached her and said with much unction: "Pretty lassie, I have here in my box of relics a superb tooth, that comes from the blessed jaw of a holy man, who died in Jerusalem, a martyr to the Saracens. I shall let you have that tooth for three silver deniers. This sacred relic will protect you from all perils of the road." Saying which, Harold the Norman was about to exhibit the marvellous tooth, when Bezenecq said smiling to him, so as to reassure his daughter; "Not now, my friend; we shall look at your relic later on. Do you claim that it protects one against all the dangers of the road?"

"Yes, worshipful townsman. I swear it upon my eternal salvation; upon my share of Paradise."

"Seeing that you carry about you that holy relic, you will not be exposed to any accident; and seeing that we go with you, and are of your company, we shall profit by the miraculous protection. All of which should not hinder us, if you follow my advice, dear companions, to take the shorter route. Let those who share my views follow me," he added giving the spurs to his mule so as to put an end to the discussion, and with that he took the road that led over the territory of the seigneur of Plouernel. The majority of the travelers followed the example of Bezenecq, because, for one thing, he spoke wisely; then also, he was known to be rich, his daughter accompanied him, and he had too much at stake to take an imprudent resolution. Those who shared the apprehensions of the monk Simon, being reduced to a small number, dared not separate from the bulk of the troop, and joined it after a moment's hesitation. Likewise Simon the monk and Jeronimo, who feared risking themselves alone on the other road. Harold the Norman, remained behind an instant, drew near one of the gibbets, pulled off the two legs and hands of a corpse, that was reduced to a mere skeleton, and placed them in his bag, counting upon selling them to the faithful for holy relics. He then rejoined the travelers, who were proceeding along the road of the seigniory of Plouernel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MANOR OF PLOUERNEL.

The castle of Neroweg VI—a somber retreat, situated, like the eyrie of a bird of prey, on the brow of a steep mountain—dominated the country for many miles around. The moment the watchman, posted on the platform of the donjon, espied from afar a troop of travelers, he sounded his horn. Immediately the band of the count, thievish and ferocious, would sally from the manor. These bandits, not satisfied with demanding the dues of passage and traffic, habitually pillaged the travelers, often even massacred them, or took them to the castle to be tortured and compelled to pay ransom. The face of Gaul bristled with similar haunts, raised by the Frankish seigneurs under the reign of Charles the Great. They were impregnable fortresses, from the heights of which barons, counts, marquises and dukes defied the royal authority, and desolated the country. The history of the Count of Plouernel is that of all these seigneurs who issued from the race of the first conquerers of Gaul. In the year 818, a Neroweg, second son of the head of this Frankish family that had been richly endowed in Auvergne since Clovis, was one of the chieftains in the army of Louis the Pious, when he ravaged Britanny, then in revolt at the call of Morvan and Vortigern. That Neroweg, in reward for his services during that war, received from the King a fief of the lands and county of Plouernel, which had reverted to the crown by the death of its last beneficiary, who left no heirs. Neroweg, in return for the cession of the county of Plouernel, was to own himself a vassal of Louis the Pious, render him fealty and homage as to his king and suzerain seigneur, pay him tribute, and support him in his wars by marching at the head of the men of his seigniory. In the country of Plouernel, as in the other provinces

of Gaul, certain colonists named villeins had succeeded in emancipating themselves and again became owners of parcels of land. Neroweg I. (the first of the name of this second branch of the family) did not revolt against the authority of the King. His son, however, Neroweg II., had a strong castle built on the summit of the mountain of Plouernel, assembled there a numerous band of determined men, and then, with most of the other seigneurs, he said to the King of the Franks: "I do not recognize your sovereignty; I will no longer be your vassal; I declare myself sovereign on my domain, like you are on yours. The serfs, villeins and townsmen of my county become my men; they, their lands, their property belong to me only; I shall tax them at my will and impose upon them tributes, rent and taille which they shall pay to me only; they will go to war for me alone, and against you, should you dare come and besiege me in my fortress of Plouernel." The King did not go, seeing that most of the seigneurs held the same language to the descendants of Charles the Great or of Hugh le Capet, whose kingdom was gradually reduced to the possession of the bare provinces that he was able to defend and preserve, arms in hand. Neroweg III. and Neroweg IV. did as their ancestor and remained independent, masters, absolute and hereditary, of the country of Plouernel. A large number of Frankish seigneurs seized in the same way other parts of the territory of Gaul. Robert thus became Count of (the country of) Paris; Milo, Count of (the country of) Tonnerre; Hugh, Count of (the country of) Maine; Burcharth, Sire of (the country of) Montmorency; Landry, Duke of (the country of) Nevers; Radulf, Count of (the country of) Beaugendy; Enghilbert, Count of (the country of) Ponthieu; etc. These and a number of other seigneurs, descendants of the leudes of Clovis or of the chieftians of the bands of Charles Martel, dropping their Frankish names, or joining to them the Gaulish names of the regions that they took possession of, had themselves called "seigneurs," "sires," "dukes" or "counts," of Paris, of Plouer-

nel, of Montmorency, of Nevers, of Tonnerre, of Ponthieu, etc., etc. During those centuries of wars and brigandage the Neroweges had fortified their castle, while they lived on rapine and on the extortion of their villeins and their serfs. Neroweg V., surnamed "Towhead," from the color of his hair, and Neroweg VI., surnamed "Worse Than a Wolf" by the wretched people of his domains on account of his cruelty, proved themselves worthy of their ancestors.

The manor of Plouernel raises its front on the summit of a rocky and arid mountain, washed on its western slope by a swift running stream, while on the east it beetles over a narrow path constructed over immense marshes, drained by a canal that feeds the vast ponds of the abbey of Meriadek, located several leagues off, and one time part of the large holdings of the diocese of Nantes. If a traveler follows the overland route he is compelled to cross this jetty on his way from Angers to Nantes, unless he be willing to make a wide detour by journeying over the domains of the seigneur of Castel-Redon. The vessels that sail into the Loire through the river of Plouernel, whose waters bathe the foot of the hills, pass close under the castle. The location of the lair is skilfully chosen. It dominates the two only routes of communication between the most important towns of the region. A stockade half bars the river of Plouernel, and serves as a shelter for the barges of the seigneur. Merchant vessels being signaled from the top of the donjon, men in arms immediately embark, board the trader, collect navigation dues, and not infrequently pillage the cargo. No less dangerous is the overland route. A palisade, into which a gate is cut, bars the passage. It can be crossed only upon paying a toll, arbitrarily imposed upon the travelers by the count's men, who, moreover, sack the baggages at their ease. If they suspect a traveler of being able to pay ransom they drag him to prison and there torture him until he consents to ransom himself. The ill-starred ones who may be too poor to pay the toll demanded are, both men and women,

forced to submit to obscene affronts, ridiculous or cruel, to the great amusement of the men of the seigneur. On one of the gentler slopes of the mountain, towards the north, the little city of Plouernel rises in tiers, built in a semi-circle and equidistant from the manor and the valley, where lie scattered the villages that the villeins and serfs inhabit. A narrow path, winding and steep, and bordered here and yonder by precipices, leads up to the first fortified enclosure, whose ramparts, thirty feet high by two feet thick and flanked with large towers of brick, constitute one mass with the rock that serves as their foundation, a rock hewn with the pick and surrounded by abysses. The dizzy path that winds above the precipices ends in a massive door covered with iron sheets and enormous nails. It is the only access to the interior of the first enclosure, a somber court, where the sun penetrates only at noon, being otherwise kept out by the height of the numerous structures that lean from within upon the ramparts. These structures are intended for the lodgement of the men-at-arms, for the masons, the chapel, the bakery, the forge and several other workshops—a mint among them. The Count of Plouernel coined money like the other feudal seigneurs, and, like them, he minted it to his liking. In the center of the court rises the principal donjon. That building, square, over a hundred feet high, crowned with a platform from which the country is far away disclosed, rests upon three tiers of subterraneous cells, surrounded by a ditch full of water furnished from springs that also serve as cisterns. The donjon seems to rise from the midst of a deep pit, in which half of this massive structure appears hidden, its upper part rising merely above the skirt of the ditch, over which falls a draw bridge. Few and narrow windows, irregularly cut into the four sides, and almost as narrow as mere loop-holes, yielded a gloomy light to the several stories and to the ground floor. The stonework of all these buildings, blackened by the inclemencies of the weather and by age, rendered still more dismal the aspect of this fortress.

CHAPTER V.

AZENOR THE PALE.

A narrow spiral staircase, built of stone, led from the bottom of the basement to the platform that surmounted the donjon of the manor of Plouernel. The men at arms, charged with the lookout on the platform, never failed to cross themselves when passing the door of an alcove, situated on the last story of the donjon, that had for its annex one of the turrets that rose from the four corners of the platform. It was whispered that the narrow window of that turret seemed internally illuminated at night by a glow of the color of blood, and these sinister lights were attributed to the sorceries of Azenor the Pale, the concubine of Neroweg VI. The seigneur of Plouernel had gathered in the chamber of his mistress a mass of precious objects, the fruits of his raids. A passage, concealed by a purple curtain, fringed with gold, gave admission to another turret, whose upper part, roofed on a level with the platform, served as the post for the lookout. Azenor the Pale, about twenty-five years of age, was of a perfect beauty. Her face was pale and her sensuous lips were the color of her skin, whence her surname. A turban of rich purple silk fabric in the shape of a chin-cloth, served as a frame for the visage of the sorceress, while it left exposed the strands of her hair, black like her eyebrows and her large eyes. Her tunic of silver cloth was negligently thrown over her shoulders. Her bosom and arms were worthy of figuring beside that beautiful Greek statue that has survived the centuries, and which, rumor has it, is still admired in the palace of the Dukes of Aquitaine. The tunic of Azenor, reaching only to her knees, left exposed below its silver folds the skirt of her dress, purple like her tur-

ban. The woman was at this moment engaged in molding a bit of pliable wax into two little figures similar to the one inserted that very morning between the teeth of Pierrine the Goat at the moment of her death agony. One of the puppets wore a bishop's robe, the other a species of armor represented by a dull-colored bit of cloth resembling iron. Azenor the Pale was inserting a certain number of needles, disposed in cabalistic order, on the left side of the breast of the two puppets, when the door of the alcove opened behind her. Neroweg VI. entered his mistress' retreat, carefully closing the door after him.

The Count of Plouernel, surnamed "Worse than a Wolf," and at that time about fifty years of age, was of athletic frame. His hair no longer was dressed after the fashion of his ancestor, the Neroweg, leude of Clovis, nor after that of Neroweg, the "Terrible Eagle," savage chief of a savage tribe. The red hair of Neroweg VI., already grizzled, was shaven smooth to the middle of the temples and the skull, and then fell square down his neck and behind his ears. The men of war had themselves thus shaven in front to prevent their hair from interfering with their casque and standing in the way of the visor. Instead of cultivating long moustaches, like his ancestors, Neroweg VI. allowed to grow at full length only his thick and coarse beard, which thus framed in his savage countenance and his hooked nose. His heavy eyebrows met over his falcon eyes, round and piercing. Always ready for war upon his neighbors, or upon those troops of travelers that, at times, attempted to offer forcible resistance to the brigandage of the seigneurs, Neroweg VI. wore a casque, which he laid by on entering. His jacket and buff hose disappeared under a hauberk or iron coat of mail, held to his waist by a leathern belt, from which hung two swords, the shorter one at his right, the longer at his left. The hauberk guarded his arms down to the gauntlets, and fell slightly below his knees, which, like his legs, were protected by iron greaves, held together with leathern thongs. The face of Neroweg VI. betrayed a

gloomy and troubled mind. Azenor the Pale, still engaged in inserting the needles into the left sides of the wax figures, was murmuring certain words in a strange tongue, and seemed not to notice the arrival of the Count. He drew slowly near, and said in a hollow voice: "Well, now, Azenor, is the philter ready?"

Without answering, the sorceress continued her magic incantations, at the conclusion of which, holding up to Neroweg VI. the two puppets, representing a bishop and a warrior, she said: "Tell me again, which are the enemies whom you dread and hate the most?"

"The Bishop of Nantes and Draco, Sire of Castel-Redon. These are my worst enemies."

"Yesterday I shaped a figure like this. Has it been placed as I ordered, between the teeth of one about to expire on the gallows?"

"One of my serfs struck my bailiff. She was hanged this morning from my seigniorial forks. At the moment when she gave up the ghost, the executioner placed the wax puppet between her teeth. Your orders have been carried out."

"In keeping with my promise, your enemies will soon be in your power. Nevertheless, in order to complete the charm, these other two little figures will have to be buried under the root of a tree, that grows at the bank of a river, in which some man or woman was drowned."

"That's easily done. There are large old willows growing on the banks of my river, and often do my men drown in it the stubborn sailors, or the men or women who refuse to pay the toll for my rights of navigation."

"That magic spell must be cast by yourself. You will have to place these little figures in the designated place to-night, when the moon goes down, and you will pronounce three times the names of Jesus, of Astaroth and of Judas. The charm will then be at its full."

"I do not like to see the name of Christ mixed up in all this. Are you, perchance, seeking to lead me into some sacrilege?"

A sardonic smile played over the white lips of Azenor the Pale. "So far from that, I have placed the magic charm under the invocation of Christ; I pronounced a verse from the gospels with each needle that I buried in these puppets. The Lord will thus be our protector."

"Had you not driven me to kill my chaplain, I might have been able to consult him and learn from him whether I would be committing sacrilege."

"You killed the tonsured fellow because you suspected that holy man of improper relations with your wife, and of probably being the father of Guy——"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Neroweg, with a voice full of anger. "Hold your tongue, accursed woman! Since that murder I have had no chaplain. No priest, consents to dwell here. Enough of that. Is the philter ready?"

"Not yet. Have patience, seigneur Count."

"What else do you want to concoct it? You wanted the blood of a young child; the young son of one of my serfs has been delivered to you——"

"The child must be prepared for the sacrifice by magic formulas."

"In a word, can you tell me when will that marvelous philter, that you have promised me, be ready?"

"I shall work upon it this very night, during the hours between the rising and the going down of the moon; that's to say, for several hours."

"That's another delay! My ailment grows apace! I suspect you of having cast upon me the evil spell under which I struggle, and which drives me to deeds of furious folly."

"You are wrong in attributing to me such an influence over your fate."

"Was it not you who incited me to kill my eldest son Gonthram?"

"Your son tried to violate me. Of course I had to appeal to your intervention for protection against fresh outrages."

"Had not my equerry Eberhard the Tricky thrown himself between me and Gonthram, I would have killed my son on his return from the hunt. He has insisted that you offered to yield yourself to him if he consented to stab me to death."

"That was a dastardly calumny!"

"Perhaps I should have plunged my dagger in your heart and be done with you."

"And why did you not?"

"Because you read in the stars that our lives were bound together, and that your death would precede mine by only three days. But if I am to die of the distemper that oppresses me, a curse upon you, sorceress! You shall not survive me. Garin the Serf-eater is charged with my vengeance. Oh, you will not leave this castle alive!" Neroweg pressed his forehead with both hands and proceeded in a spirit more and more dejected as he spoke: "The philter—Will it heal me? Since you cast your diabolical spell upon me, the days seem endless. I am indifferent to everything. After I make the rounds of my domains, shut in among the seigniories of my neighbors, all of them my enemies; after I have ravaged their lands, burned their houses, killed their serfs; after I have levied ransom on the travelers, had justice executed by my baliff, my provost and my hangman; after all that I feel sadder, wearier, more than ever tired of life. I have even surprised myself wishing for death!"

"You wage war, you eat, you drink, you hunt, you sleep and you take your female serfs to your bed when they marry. What is it you lack?"

"I am tired, cloyed with gross enjoyments. Wine tastes sour to me. I feel uneasy when I hunt in my forests, fearful of some ambush prepared by my neighbors. I find my donjon sepulchral

like a tomb. I choke under its stone vaults. If I leave the manor, I have ever under my eyes the same saddening landscape.

"Leave the country, you stupid and savage wolf!"

"Whither shall I go and be happier? Here I am master. What would my fate be elsewhere? During my absence, my neighbors would descend upon my domains like a flock of vultures. The devil! I am bound to my seigniory like my serfs to the glebe!"

"Your fate is that of all the nobles, your peers."

"But they are not weighed down by their existence like I. Only a few years ago, during the life of my wife Hermengarde, I attacked my neighbors as much for the pleasure of it as to appropriate their lands and to sack their castles. I went on the hunt for caravans of merchants with joy and spirit. I put the prisoners to the torture and delighted at their grimaces. In short, I felt that I lived; I was happy; I ate and drank enormously, and then fell asleep in the arms of one of my female serfs. The next morning I attended mass and departed for the chase, to battle or on a pillaging expedition; that is, on a new round of pleasures." After a moment's silence the seigneur of Plouernel added, with a sigh: "Those days I was a good Catholic! I practiced the faith of my fathers, and every morning, after mass, the chaplain gave me absolution for the deeds of the previous day! To-day, thanks to your wicked contrivances, all my beliefs are overthrown. I have become a pagan!—Aye, a pagan!"

"You, poor imbecile, who carry under your hauberk four relics blessed by the Pope!"

"Will you dare to mock me for my faith in relics?" bellowed Neroweg in a towering rage. "Without the relics that I carry about me you might by this time have dragged me to the bottom of hell, you worthy wife of Satan!"

"Maychance you speak truth, seigneur Count!"

"There is nothing human about you! Your lips are cold as marble; your kisses are frozen!"

"When a reciprocal love shall inflame my veins, then my lips will grow purple, and my kisses will be of fire!"

"Oh, I know it; you never loved me!"

"As well love a wolf of the forest as a Neroweg. You carried me off by force, and I have had to submit to your lust. The man whom I adore, whom I have long loved, even without seeing him, is William the Ninth, the handsome Duke of Aquitaine."

"William!" exclaimed Neroweg in an accent of ferocious jealousy. "That sacrilegious wretch, who carries on his shield the portrait of Malborgiane, his mistress!"

"William is a poet; he is young, handsome, bold, bright and gay. All women dream of, and all men dread him. You are his vassal. Woe unto you should you dare cross him! He would leave not one stone on the other in your castle. He would make you grovel on the ground on hands and knees; he would clap a saddle on you and ride on your back a hundred steps at a stretch, agreeable to the right of a sovereign over his revolted vassal. You are as far removed from the handsome Duke of Aquitaine as the dull buzzard is from the noble falcon that darts towards the sun making its golden bells tinkle!"

Neroweg uttered a cry of rage, and, drawing his dagger, rushed upon Azenor. But her marble figure remained impassive, her white lips curled in disdainful smile. "Kill me, coward knight, assassin!"

After a moment of savage irresolution, Neroweg returned his dagger to the scabbard: "Oh, damned be the day I captured you on the road to Angers. It is you who brought down the curse that rests upon this castle. But will ye, nill ye, you shall yourself break the spell you have thrown upon me and my children, who, like their father, are becoming somber and silent."

"That's the business of the philter, which I am preparing."

The conversation was at this point interrupted by two raps on the door from without. Neroweg asked roughly: "Who's that?"

"Seigneur Count," a voice answered, "you are waited to open the session of the court in the stone hall!"

Neroweg made a gesture of impatience, and, donning the iron casque which he had laid on a settee, replied: "Once the homage of my vassals pleased my vanity. To-day everything annoys, everything is irksome to me. Oh, sad is my life!"

"To-morrow, thanks to my philter, nothing more will weigh upon you—nor upon yours," observed Azenor, and, placing in the Count's hands the two little wax images, she added: "Your two enemies—the Sire of Castel-Redon and the Bishop of Nantes—will soon fall into your hands, provided you yourself place these magic figures where I have told you, while you pronounce three times the names of Judas, of Astaroth and of Jesus."

"It is hard for me to pronounce the name of Jesus in connection with this sorcery," remarked Neroweg, raising his head and receiving almost fearfully the two little figures. "To-night the philter; if not, you die to-morrow!" Then, bethinking himself, "Where is the child?"

"In that alcove," answered Azenor.

Neroweg walked towards the turret, raised the curtain and saw little Colombaik, the son of Fergan the Quarryman, lying on the floor. The innocent creature was sound asleep at the foot of a stand loaded with vases of bizarre form. The walls of the turret, paneled with marble slabs, rose bare to the ceiling, the floor of whose upper story was on a level with the platform of the donjon. Neroweg, after contemplating the child for an instant, stepped out of the donjon, double-locking the door after him, and taking care to withdraw the key and place it in his jerkin.

CHAPTER VI.

FEUDAL JUSTICE.

Eberhard the Tricky, one of the equerries of the seigneur of Plouernel, awaited his master outside of the retreat of Azenor, in company with Thiebold, justiciary provost of the seigniory. The latter addressed Neroweg, who was slowly descending the stone staircase.

"The chatelain of the fort of Ferte-Mehan signed the relinquishment of his fief of Haut-Menil at the third wedge struck into his knee by the gaoler. The Sire of Breuil-le-Haudoin died of the results of the torture. The Abbot Guilbert offers three hundred silver sous for his ransom. But he has not yet been put to the torture, and such offers mean nothing. We shall proceed in order."

"And then? What other cases are there?"

"That's all. There is to-day nothing else on hand."

While carrying on this conversation the Seigneur of Plouernel, his provost and his equerry, descended to the basement of the donjon-keep, at the corner where the staircase landed. A narrow window, guarded with enormous iron bars, alone lighted this vast hall, bare, somber and vaulted. In the inside yard several men-at-arms held themselves ready to mount their horses. Near the center of the hall, which served as a court of pleas, stood, according to custom, a large stone table, behind which ranged themselves the officers of the house of the Count—the master of the horse, the master of the chamber, the master of the dogs, of the falcons, of the table, and several other dignitaries. These people, instead of being paid by the seigneurs, bought from them these hereditary offices in their families, an inheritance that at

times became odd by the contrast it presented between the function and the incumbent. It happened that a post of runner, sold in fief to an agile and vigorous man, often descended as the inheritance of a son, as unfit for the post as a broken-winded ox. The seigneurs, with an eye to revenue, multiplied these offices all they could, and the purchasers yielded, not so much to the pride of belonging to the seigniorial households as to the desire of sheltering themselves from the master's lawlessness, and of sharing the fruits of his brigandage. In those dark days, the choice was between oppressing or being oppressed; submitting to the horrors of serfdom, or becoming the instruments of the feudal tyrants; joining them in doing violence, robbing and torturing one's fellows, or resigning oneself to undergo all these sufferings himself. Such were the sad results of the Frankish conquest. The seigneurs imposed servitude, the friars preached resignation, and the people of Gaul became cowardly, selfish and cruel. They rent themselves with their own hands by turning accomplices to their gaoler.

Besides the head domestics of Neroweg, present at these law courts,—which took the place of the Germanic "malhs" of the reign of Clovis—there was also the provost, the baliff and the scribe of the seigniory. The latter, seated on a stool, his parchment rolls on his knees, his desk beside him, his pen between his teeth, awaited the opening of the session. The first domestics of the Count, respectful and timid, remained standing in a semicircle behind their master. Since four of five centuries back, the class of the leudes, who, in the early days of the Frankish conquest, lived in common with and as equals of their chiefs, had ceased to exist. In the measure that the conquest became more firmly fixed, the titulary and beneficiary seigneurs of the soil of Gaul, shocked at the idea of equality contracted by their old companions in arms, evicted them little by little from the domains where chiefs and leudes had lived in common. The descendants of these obscure Frankish warriors, sacrificed to the

pride and cupidity of the beneficiaries, soon fell into misery, and from misery into a servitude equal to that of the Gauls. Since then, Franks and Gauls—the former disinherited by ingratitude, the latter by conquest, and now joined in misery and servitude—felt a common hatred towards the church and the seigneurs. There were then but two classes—the *common people,* serfs, peasants and bourgeois or townsmen; and *nobles,* knights and seigneurs. The latter, isolating themselves ever more, lived like absolute sovereigns in their strongholds, having no equals, but only menials, the accomplices of their acts of brigandage; or serfs, stupefied by terror or besotted by the friars.

Gonthram and Guy, the two sons of Neroweg, the younger at the left, the elder at the right of their father, attended the court. The latter had just reached the age of knighthood, a glorious event, so dearly paid for by the serfs of the seigniory. Gonthram resembled his father greatly. A look at the whelp told what he would be when age would have made of him a wolf. Guy, the younger, seventeen years of age, recalled the sardonic and vindictive features of his mother, Hermangarde. These two youths, brought up in the midst of this life of strife, of rapine and of debauchery, left to the violence of their passions, disposing as masters over an abject population, had none of the charms that are the attribute of adolescence. Away in a corner of the hall stood several bourgeois of the little town of Plouernel, who had come to complain of the exactions of the Count's men; or to excuse themselves for failure to pay the imposts in money and goods that it had pleased their seigneur to lay upon them; or to plead that the dues credited to the seigneur had long been met or exceeded; or yet to announce that they had removed from their roofs the weather-vanes, placed there in ignorance of the seigniorial rights, and taken down the pigeon houses they had started to raise in violation of the prescriptions of the feudal law.

The court was also attended by noble vassals of Neroweg, owners of smaller fortified places or of manors, held under the

Count of Plouernel, the suzerain of these fiefs, the same as Neroweg, a vassal of William IX., Duke of Aquitaine, held under that suzerain, who, as vassal of Philip I., in turn held of that French King, the supreme sovereign. This hierarchy of all feudal seigniories existed in name only, never in fact. The great vassals, veritable sovereigns, entrenched in their duchies, laughed at the impotent authority of the King. In turn, the sovereignty of the dukes was almost despised, contested or attacked by their vassals, who were absolute masters in their seigniories, as the dukes in their duchies. The immediate vassalage, however, such as rested on the vassals of the seigniory of Plouernel, was ever enforced in all its fullness and tyrannic severity. There, at any time, the implacable vengeance of the suzerain could reach directly the goods and chattels of the recalcitrant vassal. Among the people who had come from the city, from the fortified cities or from their manors, was a handsome young girl, accompanied by her mother. Sad and uneasy, the two exchanged alarmed looks when the seigneur of Plouernel, entering the law court with a somber mien, sat down on a throne, one son at his right, the other at his left, and ordered Garin the Serf-eater to call the roll of cases entered for the session.

The bailiff bore no further mark of the wound he had received from Pierrine the Goat than a plaster on his forehead. He took up a scroll and commenced calling up the list of cases:

"Gerhard, son of Hugh, who died last month, succeeds his father in the fief of Heute-Mont, held under the Count of Plouernel. He comes to acquit the right of relief, and to pledge fealty and homage to his suzerain."

Thereupon, a man still young, covered with a leather casque and carrying at his side a long sword, stepped forth from the group of persons who had come to the session of the court. He came forward holding in his hand a large purse filled with money, and placed it on the stone table, thus acquitting the right of relief due the seigneur by all vassals who take possession

of their inheritance. Then, upon a sign of the bailiff, the new castellan of Heute-Mont, taking off his casque and unbuckling the belt of his sword, placed himself humbly on both knees before the seigneur of Plouernel. The bailiff, however, noticing that the country squire, having come on horseback, retained his spurs, addressed him in any angry tone: "Vassal, dare you take the pledge of fealty and homage to your seigneur with the spurs at your heels?"

The young castellan repaired the incongruity by removing his spurs and dropping back upon his knees at the feet of Neroweg, with hands joined and head lowered, he humbly waited for his seigneur to pronounce the consecrated formula: "You acknowledge yourself my liege as the holder of a fief in my seigniory?"

"Yes, my seigneur."

"You swear upon your soul never to carry arms against me, and to serve and defend me against my enemies?"

"I swear it, my seigneur."

"Keep thy oath. At the first felonious infraction thy fief reverts to me!"

Gerhard rose, replaced his spurs and buckled on the belt of his sword, while casting a sad look upon the purse of money with which he had paid his right of relief.

After the lord of Heute-Mont, a richly dressed young girl stepped forward, uneasy, trembling and her eyes full of tears. Her mother, not less moved than herself, accompanied her. When both were a few steps from the stone table, the seigneur of Plouernel said to the damsel: "Have you decided to obey the orders of your suzerain?"

"Monseigneur," answered the young girl, in a feeble and suppliant voice, "it is impossible for me to resign myself to——"

She could not finish. Sobs smothered her words, and, breaking out in tears, she dropped her head upon the shoulder of her mother, who said to the Count: "My good seigneur, my daughter loves Eucher, one of your own vassals. Eucher loves my

daughter Yolande no less tenderly. The union of these two children would make the happiness of my life——"

"No! no!" interrupted the seigneur of Plouernel, in a towering rage. "By the death of her father Yolande holds a fief under my seigniory. Mine alone is the right to dispose of her in marriage. She must choose a husband from among the three men whom, according to our usage, I have designated. They are three Franks, that is, nobles—Richard, Enquerrand and Conrad. The eldest of them not being yet sixty years old, the age limit is observed. Does Yolande accept one of my three lieges for her husband?"

"Oh, seigneur," replied the mother imploringly, while the young girl sobbed aloud, "Richard is mean looking and blind of one eye; Conrad is a murderer; he killed his first wife in a fit of passion; Enquerrand is lame, wicked and feared by all who come near him, moreover, he is too old for my daughter, he will be sixty years within two months. None of them is fit for Yolande."

"Your daughter, accordingly, refuses to wed one of the three men presented by me?"

"Seigneur, she wishes no other husband than Eucher; and I may assure you the lad is worthy of the love of my daughter."

"The devil! We have had words enough. If your daughter insists upon refusing to select from among my men, and marries Eucher, the fief reverts to me. It is my right. I shall enforce it."

"In the name of heaven, monseigneur, if you appropriate our lands what shall we live on? Are we to beg our bread? Have pity upon us!"

Yolande raised her beautiful face, pale and wet with tears, took a step towards Neroweg, and said, with dignity: "Keep the heritage of my father. I prefer to live in poverty with him whom I love than to wed any of these men of yours who inspire me with horror."

"My daughter!" exclaimed the distracted mother, "disobedience to the seigneur of Plouernel means misery for us!"

"Marriage with one of the three men proposed, means death to me," answered the poor child.

"Seigneur, good seigneur!" resumed the stricken mother, "deign to allow Yolande to remain a spinster. You would not force her to the choice between our ruin and a marriage that horrifies her?"

"No fief can remain in the possession of a woman," was the sententious utterance of the bailiff. "Usage is opposed to it."

"We have had enough of words!" cried out Neroweg, stamping the ground with rage. "This young woman refuses to wed one of my men. The fief is now mine. Bailiff, you will this evening send a force to take possession of the house and all its contents. You will eject the two women."

"Mother, let's depart," said Yolande, proudly. "We once were free and happy; now we are no better than serfs. But I prefer their sad lot to that reserved for me by Count Neroweg in delivering me to one of his bandits."

Undoubtedly the seigneur of Plouernel would have revenged himself for the bitter reproaches of Yolande had he not been prevented by the sudden arrival of one of his men, who, running in all out of breath, brought news of the arrest of the Bishop of Nantes, who had appeared at the toll gate disguised as a mendicant friar, and was recognized by one of the guards.

"The Bishop of Nantes in my power!" exclaimed Neroweg. "Azenor predicted it. Her magic charm begins to operate!" He rose precipitately from his throne, and, followed by his sons and several of his equerries, ran to meet the bishop, his enemy, who was being led a prisoner, together with the other travelers captured by the armed guards posted at the toll gate. Bezenecq the Rich and his daughter Isoline accompanied Simon, the Bishop of Nantes, and the monk Jeronimo, clad like a prelate. After his vain efforts to induce the travelers not to cross the

seigniory of Plouernel, the bishop had, nevertheless, joined them, not venturing to enter alone with Jeronimo upon the territory of the seigneur of Castel-Redon, and hoping he would pass unperceived amidst a numerous troop. Unhappily for him, among the guards at the gate was a soldier named Robin the Nantesian, who had lived in the city of Nantes, and where he had opportunity to see the leading personages among the inhabitants. He quickly pointed out Bezenecq the Rich as a townsman from whom it would be easy to extract a big ransom. Noticing, thereupon, a monk, who seemed anxious to keep his cowl over his head, he pulled the frock off the monk and recognized the Bishop of Nantes, a personal enemy of the Count. The men of Neroweg then seized the two friars, pinioned them, as well as Bezenecq and his daughter, and accepted the toll from the other passengers, whom they allowed to pursue their journey. The bourgeois of Nantes, bound upon his mule, with his daughter bathed in tears at the crupper, was carried to the castle, with the bishop and Jeronimo, their hands tied behind their backs, following on foot. When the captives arrived at the first courtyard of the castle, Bezenecq alighted from the saddle, and, freed from his bandages, he held up his daughter, ready to faint. The bishop, pale as death, leaned upon the arm of Jeronimo, whose resolute carriage betrayed no fears. Neroweg, accompanied by his sons, arrested his hurrying steps when he came close to the prisoners, and, addressing them, said, sardonically: "I greet you, Simon! I greet you, holy man, my father in Christ! I hardly looked for this joyful meeting!"

"I am at your mercy," answered the prelate; "the will of God be done. Do with me as you will."

"I shall avail myself of your leave," replied the seigneur of Plouernel. "Oh, this is a happy day to me!"

"I ask only one favor," rejoined the bishop, "the favor of keeping near me this poor monk until the moment of my death, that he may help me to die like a Christian."

"I do not mean to send you quite so soon to Paradise. I have other designs upon you," and beckoning to Garin the Serf-eater to draw near, the seigneur of Plouernel whispered a few words in his ear. The bailiff nodded affirmatively, crossed the drawbridge and entered the donjon.

During their father's brief dialogue with the bishop, Guy and Gonthram had not ceased to pursue Isoline with their lascivious looks, and the frightened young girl had hidden her face on the breast of her father. Robin the Nantesian, raising his voice, said to Neroweg, while placing his hand on the shoulder of the townsman: "This is one of the richest merchants of the city of Nantes. He is called Bezenecq the Rich. Forget not that he is worth his weight in gold."

The Count fastened his falcon eyes upon the captive, and, taking two steps toward him, said: "Your name is Bezenecq the Rich?"

"I am so called, noble seigneur," humbly answered the bourgeois. "If your men have arrested me in order to make me pay ransom, I only request not to be separated from my daughter. Hand me a parchment. I shall write to the depositary of my money to deliver a hundred gold sous to whomever of your men shall deliver my letter to him. You will have the sum upon the return of your messenger, and you will then return our liberty to myself and my daughter." Seeing that the Count shrugged his shoulders with a sardonic smile, the merchant added: "Illustrious seigneur, instead of one hundred gold sous I will give you two hundred. But, I pray you, for mercy's sake, have me taken with my daughter to some apartment where the poor child may recover from her fright and the fatigues of the journey." Isoline, more and more alarmed at the ardent looks of the two whelps, trembled convulsively. Neroweg, silent as before, looked from time to time towards the donjon as if awaiting the return of the bailiff. Bezenecq resumed with an effort: "Seigneur, if two hundred pieces of gold do not yet suffice you, I shall go as

far as three hundred. It means my ruin. But I resign myself to that, provided you set my daughter and myself free."

At that moment Garin the Serf-eater came out of the donjon, recrossed the draw bridge and spoke in an undertone to Neroweg, who, turning to the prisoners, said: "Come along, my guests! You will learn what I am to do with you. You are to have a chat with a certain dame of great powers of persuasion."

"Oh, you butcher! You mean to put me to the torture!" cried the bishop, horror stricken. "Jesus, my God, have pity upon me! Mercy! Mercy!"

"No weakness, Simon," whispered Jeronimo to him; "we must submit to the will of God. His ways are inscrutable."

"Let the bishop be taken to his lodging; the monk shall keep him company." The bishop emitted lamentable cries and essayed to resist the men who were dragging him into the donjon. "It is now your turn to step in, Bezenecq the Rich. Come, brother, resistance is useless."

"Have I not offered you three hundred gold sous for my ransom, Count of Plouernel?" asked the merchant. "If you do not find that sum enough I shall add another hundred gold pieces. I shall have given you my whole fortune!"

"Oh, worthy brother, in honor to the commerce of Nantes, I cannot admit that one of its wealthiest merchants is worth only four hundred gold sous!" Then, turning to his men: "Conduct my guest and his daughter to their quarters."

At the moment when the men of Neroweg were about to take hold of Bezenecq the Rich, Gonthram, brutally seizing the hand of Isoline, whom the merchant held fainting in his embrace, said: "I take this girl! She is my share of the ransom!"

"I also want her," cried out Guy, his eyes all aflame and advancing toward his brother with a menacing look. But Gonthram, little caring for the words and threats of his brother, made ready to seize the maid and carry her off. Guy then drew his sword. Gonthram in turn drew his, while the daughter of

the townsman, distracted with terror, shrank within herself, inert, in a swoon.

"Guy! Gonthram! Put up your swords! This maid shall be none of yours," ordered Neroweg. "She shall not leave her father. In the presence of his daughter the bourgeois will prove more accommodating. Put back your swords! You, Garin," he went on, turning to the bailiff, "take this beauty in your arms, if she cannot walk, and carry her in with the old man."

Isoline, catching, despite her terror, the last words of Neroweg, rose to her feet with an effort and said to Garin in a suppliant voice: "For mercy's sake, my good seigneur, take me along with my father. I shall have strength to walk."

"Come," answered the bailiff, leading her to the draw bridge, while Guy and Gonthram, slowly returning their swords to their scabbards, exchanged such vindictive looks that the Count considered it necessary to remain near them in order to prevent a fresh outbreak.

Isoline, following Garin with unsteady step, crossed the draw bridge and entered the hall of the stone table, where still several vassals of the seigneur awaited the close of the session that had been interrupted by the arrival of the prisoners. At one of the corners of this hall was the stone staircase that led down in a spiral from the platform of the donjon to its lowest cells. Near the steps was a trap door. Two men of sinister figure, clad in goat skins and carrying lanterns in their hands, stood near the gaping opening. Bezenecq was loudly calling for his daughter, and resisting with all his force the men who were dragging him in. Seeing, however, his daughter advancing towards him, he ceased to offer resistance, but broke down, weeping.

"Hurry up, my rich townsman!" said Garin the Serf-eater to him; "my seigneur wishes that you and your daughter remain together." Then, turning to the gaolers who carried the lanterns: "Go down first and light our way." The gaolers obeyed, and soon the merchant and Isoline disappeared with them in the depths of the subterranean donjon.

CHAPTER VII.

ABBOT AND MONK.

The donjon cells of the manor of Plouernel consisted of three vaulted stories, the only daylight into which penetrated through three narrow slits opening upon the gigantic ditch, out of which rose the donjon itself. Within, apart from a massive door studded with iron, these cells consisted of stone only—they were roofed with stone, floored with stone, and the walls were of stone, ten feet thick. The cell, whither the Bishop of Nantes and the monk Jeronimo were taken, was at the very bottom of this subterraneous structure. A narrow loophole barely filtered through a pale ray of light into that semi-Stygian darkness. The walls sweated a greenish moisture. In the center of the dungeon stood a stone bed, intended for torture or death. Chains and heavy iron rings fastened to the headpiece, to the sides and the feet of the long stone slab, that rose three feet above the floor, announced the purpose of that funereal couch, on which were now seated the monk and the Bishop of Nantes. The latter, a prey at first to agonizing despair, had by degrees recovered his composure. His face, now almost serene with a melancholic good nature, contrasted with the somber severity of his companion. "I am now resigned to death," the prelate was saying to Jeronimo, "yet I confess, I feel my heart fail me at the thought of leaving my wife and children without protection in days as dark as these are."

"There you have one of the consequences of the marriage of priests," the monk answered. "How justly did Gregory VII. reason when he forced the councils to interdict marriage to the clergy!"

After a moment's silence the Bishop of Nantes resumed with a melancholy smile: "Stoics, like the philosophers of antiquity, let's consider at this very moment of imminent torture and death the dogmas that bear upon our present situation."

"Let's commence with the great question of the spiritual and temporal dominion of the church."

"It is a grand subject. I listen."

"In our days, for every twenty abbots or bishops who are sovereign in their abbeys or bishoprics, are there not a hundred dukes, counts, marquises or seigneurs, sovereign masters in their dukedoms, counties or seigniories?"

"Sad to say, 'tis so!"

"Did not a large portion of the estates, that proceeded from the gifts of Charles Martel, return to the hands of the clergy at the time of the terror the people were seized with at the thought of the end of the world,—a terror ably fomented by the church down to the year 1000, and prolonged to 1033 by dint of able maneuvers?"

"That's true, too. The terrified seigneurs abandoned to the church a large part of their goods, thinking the day of judgment was at hand. Since then, however, the same seigneurs, or their descendants, retook their rich donations from the clergy. The hatred that the Count Neroweg pursues me with has no other cause than the recovery of the lands that his grandfather bequeathed to my predecessor, at the time when those brutes expected to see the end of the world. The Count wages war against me to re-enter upon domains that once belonged to his family. The lance is rising against the holy water sprinkler."

"It has been so in all the other provinces. One of the causes of the wars of the seigneurs against the bishops and abbots has, for the last fifty years, been the recovery of the goods given to the Church on the occasion of the end of the world. In these impious strifes the seigneurs have almost always come out on top. The church was vanquished."

"It is a sad fact."

"In order to recover its omnipotence, the Church must again become richer than the seigneurs. She must, above all, rid herself forever of those brigands who dare reach out a sacrilegious hand towards the goods of the Church, and assault the priests of our Lord, the ministers of God."

"Alack, Jeronimo, it is a far way from the wish to the fact! The sword gets the best of the bishop's crook!"

"The distance is simply the journey from here to Jerusalem. That's all!"

The bishop regarded the monk with amazement, repeating without understanding the words: "The journey from here to Jerusalem!"

"I am a legate of Pope Urban II.," proceeded Jeronimo. "As such, I am initiated in the policies of Rome. The French Pope Gerbert, and, after him, Gregory VII., conceived a great idea—to submit the peoples of Europe to the papal will. In order, however, to habituate them to a passive obedience, an ostensible purpose had to be held out. Gerbert conceived the thought of the deliverance of the tomb of Christ, which had fallen into the hands of the Saracens, the masters of Syria and Jerusalem. This pregnant thought, conceived in the head of Gerbert and hatched out by Gregory VII., was the subject of long cogitations on the part of their successors. The Popes recommended to the faithful the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to which they attached special indulgencies and privileges. The people of Germany, of Spain, of Gaul, of England, gradually began to hear Jerusalem, the Holy City, talked about. The pilgrimages multiplied. Long though the voyage was, it did not seem impossible; moreover, it insured indulgences for all crimes, and, above all, it was a pleasure trip for the mendicants, the vagabonds, the runaway serfs from the domains of their masters. The pilgrims found good lodgings in the abbeys; they picked up some little money in the cities, and obtained free passage on the Genoese or Vene-

tian vessels as far as Constantinople, where they then departed for Jerusalem, traversing Syria and lodging over night from convent to convent. Arrived at the Holy City, they paid their devotions."

"And all that without any interference on the part of the Saracens. We must admit it among ourselves, Jeronimo, those miscreants showed themselves quite tolerant! The churches rose in peace beside the mosques; the Christians lived in tranquility, and the pilgrims were never incommoded."

"And it remained so," continued Jeronimo, "until the Saracens, exasperated by the anathemas hurled at the sectarians of Mahomet by the Catholic priests of Jerusalem, brought their hammer down upon the holy Temple of Solomon and demolished it—a demolition, however, that we avenged upon Jews by massacring them in the several countries of Europe. But after all, we cared little about the destruction of the Temple, or the safety of the Sepulchre. Our end was attained. The people had learned to know the road to Jerusalem. The sandals of the pilgrims had smoothed the road to the Holy Land to the Catholic peoples. The number of pilgrims increased from year to year. Often seigneurs, certain to obtain by means of that pious voyage the absolution of their crimes, joined the pilgrim vagabonds and beggars. That perpetual flux and reflux of peoples of all stations drew ever more the eyes of Europe to the Orient. The marvels narrated by the pilgrims upon the return from their long voyage, the relics that they brought back, the respect with which the Church surrounded them,—everything affected more and more the spirit of credulity and the vulgar imagination of the masses. Gregory VII. foresaw these results. He considered it opportune to preach the Holy War. The Church raised her voice: 'Shame and sorrow upon the Catholic world! The Sepulchre of the Saviour of man is in the power of the Saracens! Kings and seigneurs, march at the head of your peoples to the deliverance of the Sepulchre of Christ and the extermination of the infidels.'

To that premature appeal Europe remained indifferent. The hour of the Crusades had not yet sounded. Since then, however, the idea has made progress, and to-day we are certain to find the minds disposed to second the Pope in his projects. Accordingly, Urban II. has not hesitated to leave Rome and come to preach the Crusade in Gaul, the Catholic country *par excellence!*"

"What say you? The Pope himself is coming to preach the Crusade! Can that be true, oh, my God!"

"His Holiness is bound for Auvergne, and he sends his emissaries into the other provinces."

"And who are the men invested with the confidence of the Pope, and charged with leading such an undertaking to a successful end?"

"One of them, Peter the Hermit, vulgarly called 'Cuckoo Peter,' is a monk who has twice accomplished the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He is an ardent man, gifted with a savage eloquence that exercises upon the multitudes a powerful effect. Another emissary is Walter the Pennyless, a knight of adventure, bold Gascon, charged to seduce with the cheerfulness of his words and the exaggeration of his descriptions all those who might remain indifferent to the savage eloquence of Peter the Hermit."

"But what arguments will these emissaries advance in order to rouse the masses to these insensate migrations?"

"I shall answer that question presently. But let me remind you of the principal motives of the church to drive the people to the Crusades; to habituate Catholic Europe to rise at the voice of the Pope for the extermination of heretics; to switch off to Palestine a large number of the seigneurs who are contending with the Church for the goods of the earth and the dominion of the people,—to get rid of one's enemies."

"The idea is good, profound, politic. I can well see the object that the Pope has in view."

"Let me, furthermore, call your attention to a fact that renders necessary a large migration of the common people to the Holy Land. In Gaul, despite the private wars of the seigneurs and the sufferings of this century, the population of the serfs has multiplied to an extraordinary degree during the last fifty years."

"That is so. The serf population, decimated by the famines that reigned from 1000 to 1034, immediately began to recover with the years of plenty that followed upon those of dearth."

"Aided, above all, by the action of the Church when, desirous of repeopling her domains, stripped of its agricultural serfs, she caused the 'Armistice of God' to be proclaimed, interdicting the seigneurs and the bishops from levying war during three days of each week under penalty of excommunication."

"That plebeian increase brought on the formidable revolts of the serfs of Normandy and Brittany, when doggerels were sung containing strophes of unheard-of audacity, as you may judge from this one:

Why allow we ourselves to be oppressed?
Are we not human like the seigneurs?
Have we not, as they, body and limbs?
Is not our heart as large as theirs?
Are we not one hundred serfs to a single knight?
Let's then be up striking with our pitchforks and our scythes!
For lack of arms, take the stones the roads are strewn with!
Death to the friars!'

"And that's the truth, Jeronimo! Those songs of revolt gave the signal to terrible insurrections in Normandy and Brittany. But two or three millions of the rebels had their eyes put out, their feet and hands chopped off, and the revolt was stamped out. Those wicked people must be exterminated."

"In order to conjure away the return of similar uprisings, it is necessary to lead abroad the plebeian increase. The plebs grows threatening by reason of its numbers and the force that

numbers carry with them. In order to weaken it, it will be enough to make it depart on the Crusade across Europe."

"Explain to me how the Crusades are expected to bring about the results that you consider needful, and that the exhortations of the papal emissaries are to invoke."

"Is it not evident that, for every thousand serfs who will leave Gaul to fight in Palestine, barely a hundred will arrive as far as Jerusalem? Those wretches, departing penniless, in rags, without provisions, carrying wife and children in their train, ravaging the regions they traverse—Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, Bulgaria, the countries of the Danube—because, in the course of so long a voyage, such multitudes cannot live without pillage along the route, three-fourths of them will have been exterminated by the inhabitants of the countries that they must cross, or will die of hunger and fatigue before being able to reach Jerusalem. The small number of them that will arrive before the Holy City will be still further decimated by the Saracens. It is safe to say that hardly any of those who leave will return. Thus we shall be rid of this vile and dangerous populace that dares rise against its masters, especially against the Church."

"It remains to be seen, Jeronimo, whether this plebs mass will be senseless enough to venture upon so distant and perilous a journey."

The monk answered: "Is not the lot of the villeins and the serfs on the lay or ecclesiastical seigniories the most wretched? And, of all the yokes, is not that of the glebe the heaviest, which forbids them to cross the boundaries of their own seigniory. When the Church will say to those myriads of people, chained down to the glebe: 'Go! You are free! March off to fight the Saracens in Palestine, the country of miracles, where you will gather an immense booty! Take no heed of provisions for the journey, God will provide! Above all, you will accomplish your eternal salvation!' the serfs will depart in mass, drawn by the desire to be free, the thirst for booty, the spirit of adventure,

and by the pious ardor to deliver the Holy Sepulchre from the defilement of the infidels!"

"Jeronimo," rejoined the Bishop of Nantes, "the craving after freedom, the spirit of adventure, the hope of booty, may, perhaps, drive those wretches to Palestine. But desire to avenge the tomb of the Saviour from the pretended defilement of the infidels, is, meseems, too feeble a motive. We shall fail there."

"When this holy cause, thrice holy and eloquently preached by the Church, is furthermore backed by the thirst for freedom, the hope of booty, the certainty of gaining Paradise, and curiosity regarding the future, that, though unknown, could not be worse than the present, the attraction of the populace for Palestine will become irresistible."

"I grant it. But will the seigneurs consent to have their lands thus depopulated by allowing the serfs to depart for the Crusades?"

"As much as ourselves do the seigneurs dread the revolt of the serfs. In that we two have a common interest. Moreover, that plebs overflow, which it is the part of wisdom to empty out abroad, constitutes, at the highest, only one-third of the serfs. Only that third will depart."

"And who guarantees that many more will not yield to the attraction, that you consider irresistible, and will not go along?"

"This plebs mass has become craven through the habit of slavery that weighs it down since the Frankish conquest. Only a part of the village and country populations is sufficiently disposed to revolt. It is those very ones who are most impatient of the yoke, the most intelligent, the most venturesome, the most daring, and, consequently, the most dangerous, who will be the first to start for Palestine. Thus shall we be rid of those inciters of rebellion."

"That reasoning is correct."

"Thus only one-third of the rustic plebs will emigrate. Those who remain behind will suffice to cultivate the land. Being fewer

to the task, their toil will increase. The ox that is heavily burdened, the ass that is heavily laden, does not kick. The danger of a new revolt will have been conjured off. The Church will resume her preponderance over both the plebs and the seigneurs."

"I admire, Jeronimo, the powerful combinations of the politics of the papacy. But one of the most important results of this policy would be to deliver us from a large number of those accursed seigneurs, always at war against us. Oh, they will not, like the serfs, be driven by the desire to escape a fearful lot, or of enjoying freedom. They, I fear, will remain at home."

"A large number of them are as anxious as their serfs to change their condition. After all, what is the life of these seigneurs? Is it not that of chiefs of brigands? Always at war; always on the watch, fearing to be attacked or surprised by their neighbors; unable but rarely to leave their seigniories except armed to the teeth; often not daring even to go on the hunt in their own domains; forced to entrench themselves in their lairs; these ferocious men are tired of such monotonous life. They will follow the stream."

"I have, indeed, often been struck by the expression of mortal tiredness reflected upon the faces of the seigneurs."

"This will be the language of the friars to these men steeped in crime, brutified almost as much as their own serfs, and all of them nursing at the bottom of their hearts a more or less profound fear of the devil: 'You are smothering in your castles of stone; you here wrangle over the meager spoils of some traveler, or over the barren lands of the Occident—lands peopled with wretches resembling animals rather than human beings. Leave the ungrateful soil and somber sky of the Occident! Go to Palestine, go to the Orient, the land of azure and of sunshine, fertile, splendid, radiant, studded with magnificent cities, palaces of marble, gilded cupolas, delicious gardens! There you will find the treasures for centuries accumulated by the Saracens, treasures so prodigious that they suffice to pave with gold, rubies,

pearls and diamonds the whole road from Gaul to Jerusalem! God delivers into your hands that teeming soil, its palaces, its beautiful women, its treasures. Depart on the Holy War!' A large number of seigneurs will bite with all the snap of their heavy jaws at that bait glittering with all the fires of the sun of the Orient."

"You are right, Jeronimo," observed the Bishop of Nantes. "But do you not fear that the seigniorial station, thus stripped, shrunk and ruined, will leave the place open for the royalty, to-day without power, and that that royalty will not endeavor to share with us the dominion of the people, and will not even strive to dominate the Church?"

"We need not fear the rivalry of the Kings. Even their private interests are to us a safe guarantee of their submission to the will of the Pope, the representative of God on earth, the dispenser of eternal rewards or punishments."

"Oh, Jeronimo, your words have opened a new horizon before me. I see now the future of the Catholic Church in all her formidable majesty. I now cleave to life, and would wish to assist at that magnificent spectacle."

"This topic has a close bearing upon our present position of prisoners of Neroweg VI, and you must inspire yourself with it, Simon, to the end that you may regulate your conduct accordingly."

"Tell me what I am to do, Jeronimo. I can take no more precious a guide than you in all matters concerning our holy religion."

"Neroweg relies upon your torture to extort from you the possession of the domains of your diocese, which he has long coveted. Accede to all that he may demand. Peter the Hermit and Walter the Pennyless will not be long in arriving in this region to preach the Crusade. Neroweg will depart for Jerusalem, and will not be able to profit from the concessions you will have granted."

"But say he insists upon putting me to the torture to glut his thirst for revenge upon me! I shudder at the prospect."

The conversation between the Bishop of Nantes and the monk was here interrupted by a rumbling and weird noise, that seemed to proceed from the interior of the thick wall. The two prelates trembled with affright, and looked at each other. Then, drawing near the wall in the direction from which the noise came, they applied their ears with bated breath. But the noise slowly receded, and a few minutes later died away completely.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHAMBER OF TORTURE.

The dungeon of Bezenecq the Rich and his daughter, vaulted and floored with stone slabs like the other subterranean cells, but located on the second story of that redoubtable structure, received a somewhat better light from its narrow loop-hole. In the center of the cell stood a gridiron, six feet long, three wide, raised a good deal above the floor, and constructed of iron bars placed slightly apart from each other. Chains and rings, fastened to the gridiron, served to keep the victim in position. Near this instrument of punishment rose two other engines of torture, devised with ingenious ferocity. The one consisted of a projecting iron bar, in the nature of a gibbet about seven or eight feet above the floor, and terminating in an iron carcan that opened and closed at will. A heavy stone, weighing about two tons, and furnished with a ring and a strap to hang it by, lay at the foot of the gibbet. The other engine had the appearance of a gigantic prong, sharp and turned back similar to those used by butchers to hang their quarters of beef on. The slabs of the flooring, covered everywhere else with greenish moisture, wore a blood-red tint under the prong. Opposite to this instrument of punishment, there was grossly sculptured on the wall, a sort of grinning mask, hideous, half beast, half human; its eyes and the cavity of its gaping mouth, resembled deep black holes. Finally, close to the door of the cell stood a wooden box full of straw, and there lay the daughter of the townsman of Nantes, colorless like a corpse, and frozen with terror. At times her body shook with convulsive shivers, other times she remained motionless, her eyes shut, without, therefore, however, her tears

ceasing to stream down her cheeks. Bezenecq the Rich, seated on the edge of the straw bed, his elbows on his knees and his forehead hidden in his hands, was saying to himself: "The seigneur of Plouernel. . . . A descendant of Neroweg! . . . Strange, fatal encounter! . . . Woe is us!"

"Oh, father," murmured the maid in a fainting voice, "this encounter is our sentence of death."

"The sentence of our ruin, but not of our death. Calm yourself, poor child, the seigneur of Plouernel knows not that our obscure family, descended from the Gallic chieftain Joel, who made a head against Cæsar, has been at strife with his own all through the past ages, since the Frankish conquest. But when that bailiff pronounced the name of Neroweg VI, which I had not heard mention during this ill-starred journey, and when, questioned by me, that man answered his master belonged to the ancient Frankish family of Neroweg, established in Auvergne since the conquest of Gaul by Clovis, I no longer had any doubts, and, despite myself, I shuddered at the recollection of our family records, which our father once read to us at Laon, and that have remained in that country, in the hands of Gildas, my elder brother."

"Oh, why did our grandfather leave Brittany. Our family lived there so happy."

"Dear child, our grandfather, who lived near the sacred stones of Karnac, the cradle of our family, could no longer endure the oppression of the Breton seigneurs, who had grown to be as cruel as their Frankish fellows. He sold his little havings, and embarked with his wife at Vannes on a merchant vessel bound for Abbeville. He settled down in that city, where he set up a modest trade. Later, my father moved into the province of Picardy, and settled at Laon, where my elder brother Gildas still carries on the currier's trade. Coming by sea from Abbeville to Nantes to traffic in the articles of our trade, manufactured in Laon, I became acquainted with your mother, the

daughter of the merchant to whom I was directed. Her parents did not wish to part from her. They made me promise not to leave Nantes. I became the partner of my wife's father, and grew rich in the business. Your mother then died. You were still a child. Her death was the greatest sorrow of my life. But you were left to me. You grew in gracefulness and beauty. Everything smiled upon me again. I was happy. And behold us now, while yielding to the wishes of your grandmother—" and Bezenecq interrupted himself with a cry of despair: "Oh, it is frightful!"

"But how could we have merited the terrible punishment that seems reserved to us?"

"Oh," replied the bourgeois of Nantes with a sigh, "my happiness rendered me forgetful of the misfortune of our brothers! I was selfish!"

"Dear father, you surely exaggerate the faults or errors of your life."

"Millions of serfs and villeins people the lands of the seigneurs and the clergy. Among them, some drag along a painful existence, that ends in death from exhaustion and misery; others are hanged from the patibulary forks. Those unhappy people are Gauls like ourselves. If some townsmen live in tranquility in the cities, when they have for seigneur so gentle a master as Simon of Nantes, millions of serfs and villeins, on the other hand, are devoted to all the miseries of life, and victims to the seigniories and the Church."

"But, father, it did not depend upon you to alleviate the ills of these wretched folks."

"My father spoke like a brave and generous man when he said to the bourgeoisie of the city of Laon: 'We are subject to the exactions of the bishop, our seigneur. But, after all, we townsmen enjoy certain franchises. It, therefore, devolves upon us, being more intelligent and less miserable than the serfs of the fields, to aid these to their deliverance by ourselves rising

against the seigneurs, and thus setting the example of revolt against oppression. In the instances where, of their own accord, they rise as happened in Normandy, as happened in Picardy, as happened in Brittany, it is then our duty to place ourselves at their head, in order to insure the success of the insurrection. Is it not a shame, an unworthy timidity, to allow those unhappy men to be crushed and punished for a cause that is ours as much as theirs? Does not the tyranny of the nobles and the friars weigh upon us also. Are not we the prey of the feudal brigands the moment we leave the enclosure of the cities, where we suffer an amplitude of affronts?' But my father's words were not able to convince the townsmen to decide upon insurrection. They feared to risk their property and make their lot worse. Myself, having grown rich, sided with the self-seekers, and I echoed the views of the other merchants: 'No doubt, the condition of the serfs is horrible, but I can do nothing to improve it, and I dare not stake my life and fortune upon the result of an insurrection.' Our cowardly and selfish indifference increased the audacity of the seigneurs, until to-day we cannot set foot outside the cities without being exposed to the brigandage of the chatelains. Oh, my child, I am punished for having lacked energy and for disregarding the precepts of my father!"

"We are lost; there is no hope left!" exclaimed the maid, no longer able to restrain her sobs. "Death, a shocking death awaits us!" And Isoline, whose teeth chattered with terror, directed her father's attention, with a gesture, to the instruments of tortue that furnished the cell. Hiding her face in her hands, she moaned convulsively.

"Isoline," rejoined Bezenecq imploringly and overcome with grief, "my beloved child, listen to the word of reason. Terror exaggerates. The aspect of this subterranean dungeon frightens. Oh, I understand that. But let's not lose all hope. When I shall have subscribed to all that the seigneur of Plouernel can exact from me, when I shall have consented to strip myself for

his benefit of all that I possess, what do you imagine he could still do? Of what use to him would it be to have me tortured? He entertains against me no personal hatred. He is after my wealth. I shall give it all, absolutely all."

"Good father, you are seeking to calm my spirit. I thank you a thousand times."

"Is not our fate sufficiently sad? Why make the reality still darker? I had hoped to give you a rich dower, to bequeath to you later my property, that would have insured the happiness of your children. And now I am about to be stripped of all. Our descendants will be reduced to poverty!"

"Oh, if only the seigneur of Plouernel grants us our lives, I would care little for that wealth that, for my sake, you bemoan."

"Nor shall I be less courageous than you," said Bezenecq, tenderly clasping the hands of his daughter: "I shall imagine I placed all my money on board a ship that went down. Once out of this infernal castle, dear child, we shall return to Nantes. I shall see my friend Thibault the Silversmith. He knows my aptitude for commerce. He will employ me, and will pay me a salary that will suffice for our needs. But it will be necessary, my pretty Isoline," Bezenecq proceeded, forcing a smile to calm his daughter, "it will then be necessary for you to sew our clothes with your own little white hands, and prepare our frugal meals. Instead of inhabiting our beautiful house on the place of Marche-Neuf, we shall take humble lodgings in the quarter of the ramparts. But, what of it, provided the heart is joyful! Moreover, I shall always have in my pocket a few deniers wherewith occasionally, on my return home, to buy you a new ribbon for your neck, my dear, sweet child, or a bouquet of roses to cheer your little bedroom."

Isoline felt hope rising within her at the words of her father, and shut her eyes not to be reminded of the horrible reality by the sight of the hideous stone mask and of the instruments of punishment. The maid hid her face on the breast of her father

and murmured with emotion: "Oh, if only your words would prove true! If we only could quit this castle! So far from regretting our lost riches, I would thank God for affording me the opportunity of working for my venerated father!"

"Damosel Isoline, I shall know how to provide," gayly replied Bezenecq. "Moreover, who knows, but I may soon find an assistant. Who knows but that some worthy lad will demand you in marriage, falling in love with this charming face, when it shall have regained its rosy hue?," added the merchant, tenderly embracing his daughter.

"Father!" screamed Isoline, pointing with a gesture of dread toward the wall where the hideous stone mask was sculptured, and whose eyes seemed lighted from within. "Look, look at those flashes of light that escape from it! Some one has been spying upon us!"

The merchant quickly turned his head in the direction of the wall indicated by Isoline and to which he had given his back up to that instant. But the light had disappeared. Bezenecq took it for an illusion, proceeding from the wrought-up spirit of Isoline, and answered: "You must have deceived yourself. How do you expect the eyes of that rude figure to flash light? It would require a candle in the middle of the wall. Is that possible my child? Regain your senses!"

Suddenly the door of the cell opposite the mask was opened. Bezenecq the Rich and his daughter saw the bailiff, Garin the Serf-eater, enter with the scribe of the seigneur of Plouernel, and followed by several men of sinister mien. One of these carried a forge-bellows and a bag of coal; another bore several faggots. Isoline, for a moment reassured by her father, but now recalled to reality by the approach of the gaolers, uttered a scream of fright. In order to calm the agonies of his daughter, Bezenecq rose and said to the bailiff in a firm voice, while pointing to the scribe: "That, dear sir, is certainly the notary of the seigneur of Plouernel?" Garin the Serf-eater nodded in the

affirmative. "This notary," continued the bourgeois of Nantes, "comes to obtain my signature to the document by which I consent to pay ransom?" The bailiff again nodded in the affirmative. Addressing himself then to his daughter and affecting absolute calmness, almost cheerfulness: "Fear nothing, dear child, I and these worthy men will soon agree, after which, I am certain, we shall have nothing to fear from them and they will set us free. Note, then, master scribe, I am ready, by means of an authentic deed in favor of the seigneur of Plouernel, to give and cede to him all my possessions, consisting of five thousand and three hundred silver pieces, deposited with my friend Thibault, the silversmith and minter of the Bishop of Nantes; secondly, eight hundred and sixty gold pieces and nine bars of silver, deposited in my house in a secret closet that I shall indicate to the person whom the seigneur count may commission to go to Nantes; thirdly, a large quantity of silver vessels, precious fabrics and furniture, which it will be easy to bring here by wagon, upon the written order that I shall issue to my confidential servant. There, finally, remains my house. Seeing it would not be quite practicable, worthy masters, to transport that also, I shall write and place in your hand a letter to my friend Thibault. Only two days before my departure from Nantes he promised to buy my house for two hundred pieces of gold. He will keep his promise, I am sure, especially when he learns of the tight place that I now find myself in. Accordingly, that's two hundred more gold pieces that, at my order, Thibault will have to deliver to the envoy of the seigneur of Plouernel. These assignments made, there remain to me and my daughter the clothes we have on. Now, worthy scribe, draw up the assignment, I shall sign it, and I shall join to it the letters to my servant and to my friend the silversmith. He knows too well the fashion of these times to fail to acquiesce in my wishes in the matter of the deposit that he has and of the purchase of the house. He will deliver the sum to the messenger whom the seigneur count

is to dispatch to Nantes. As to the money in the secret closet of my house, it will be easy to find it with the help of this key and the directions that I shall dictate to the scribe——"

"The notary will first have to draw up the assignment, then, you shall write the letters to your friend," broke in Garin. "The directions for the secret closet will follow. Now hurry up."

"You are right, worthy bailiff," replied the bourgeois of Nantes with eagerness, fully at ease by the tone of Garin; and, leaning towards his daughter, who was seated on the edge of the bed, he said to her in an undertone: "Was I not right, my dear bundle of fears, in assuring you that, by a complete surrender of all my goods, these worthy masters would abstain from harming us?" Again embracing Isoline, whose fears began to make room for hope, and wiping with the back of his hand the tears that, despite himself, he was shedding, he turned to Garin: "Excuse me, bailiff, you would understand my emotion if you knew the foolish fears of this child. But what else can we expect! At her age, having until now lived happily at my side, she is easily alarmed——"

"First item: Five thousand and three hundred silver pieces deposited with the silversmith Thibault," recited the scribe, interrupting Bezenecq with his harsh voice; and, taking his seat on the edge of the gridiron, he wrote, on his knees for a desk, by the light of one of the lanterns. "Next and secondly," he pursued, "how many pieces of gold are there in the secret treasure of the Nantes house?"

"Eight hundred and sixty pieces of gold," Bezenecq hastened to answer, as if in a hurry to disengage himself of his riches; "and also nine bars of silver of different thicknesses." And, thus proceeding to enumerate his goods to the scribe, who entered them apace, the merchant pressed the hands of his daughter in an intoxication of pleasure to add to her confidence and courage.

"And now, Bezenecq the Rich," said Garin, "we shall want

the two letters to your confidential servant and your friend Thibault the Silversmith."

"Kind scribe,"answered the merchant, "lend me your tablet, give me two parchment sheets and a pen, I shall write yonder on my daughter's knees," and, suiting the act to the words, he placed himself at Isoline's knees, where he lay the notary's tablet, and wrote the letters, occasionally addressing the poor child with a smile: "Do not shake my table that way; you will have these worthy gentlemen form a poor opinion of my handwriting." The two letters finished, the merchant passed them over to Garin, who, after reading them, said:

"Now, we want the directions for the secret treasure, without which the assignment may not be effective."

"Here are two keys," said the merchant, drawing them from his pocket. "The one opens the door of a little vault which connects with the room that serves as my office——"

"In the room that serves as office," repeated the scribe, writing while he repeated the words of the merchant. The latter proceeded: "The other key opens an iron-bound box back of the vault. In that box will be found the bars of silver and a casket containing the eight hundred and sixty gold pieces. I own not another denier. And here, worthy masters, you have me and my daughter as poor as the poorest serf. I have not wronged the seigneur of Plouernel a single obole. But, for all that, we shall not lose courage!"

While the scribe finished transcribing the directions of Bezenecq, the latter, occupied only with his daughter, did not notice, any more than she, what was going on a few steps off in that cell, so feebly lighted by the lanterns, seeing that night had already fallen. One of the gaolers commenced heaping the coals and fagots under the gridiron.

"The seigneur of Plouernel may send his messenger to Nantes with an escort," Bezenecq observed to Garin the Serf-eater. "If the messenger is quick he can be back to-morrow night. We

shall surely, my daughter and I, be set at liberty when the seigneur count will be in possession of my property. Only, while waiting for the hour of our departure from the castle, be generous enough, bailiff, to have us taken to some other place, whatever it be, only less depressing than this. My daughter is broken down with fatigue; moreover, she is very timid. She would spend a sad night in this cell, surrounded by instruments of torture."

"Now that you mention these engines of punishment," said Garin the Serf-eater, with a strange smile, and taking the hand of the bourgeois, "come, Bezenecq the Rich, I wish to explain their use to you, especially their mechanism."

"I am not inquisitive to learn the details."

"Draw near to us, Bezenecq the Rich."

"That surname of 'Rich' that you insist in applying to me, is no longer mine," said the merchant with a sad smile; "rather call me Bezenecq the Poor."

"Oh," exclaimed Garin, as if in doubt and shrugging his shoulders. He then added: "Come on, Bezenecq the Rich!"

"Father!" cried out Isoline, uneasy, seeing her father stepping away from her. "Where are you going? Father, father, stay with me!"

"There is nothing to fear, dear child. Stay where you are. I am to give the bailiff certain directions as to the route that the messenger of the seigneur count will have to take." And, fearing to displease Garin, he followed him, happy at the thought that Isoline could not hear the explanations he was to receive from the Seaf-eater. The latter stopped first before the iron gibbet that terminated in a carcan. One of the gaolers having raised the lantern at the order of Garin, he said to the merchant: "As you see, that carcan opens at will. You may guess its object."

"Yes. The neck of the patient being inserted in it, the poor fellow remains fast!"

"Just so. He is made to climb the ladder you see here. Then, as his neck is in the carcan, all you have to do is to close the collar with a latch and remove the ladder. The gibbet being raised nine or ten feet above the floor, you may imagine the rest."

"The patient remains hanged and strangled?"

"Not at all! He remains suspended, but not hanged. The carcan is too wide to strangle. Then, while our man is thus kicking in the air an equal distance between the ceiling and the floor, this large stone is fastened to his feet by means of these straps to moderate his kicking and induce him to keep quiet."

"That strain must be terrible."

"Terrible, Bezenecq the Rich, terrible! Just think of it! The jaws are dislocated, the neck is stretched, the jointures of the knees and hip crack fit to be heard ten paces off. And yet,—would you believe it?—there are people of such a stubborn make-up that they do not yield to this first trial?"

"What I do not understand," answered the merchant, suppressing his horror, "is that, instead of exposing themselves to this torture, they do not forthwith and loyally surrender all they own, as I have done. One, at least, escapes physical suffering and regains his freedom. Not so, worthy bailiff?"

"Bezenecq the Rich, you are the pearl of townsmen. It is evident that you are of extraordinary sagacity."

"You flatter me. I merely put myself through a very simple process of reasoning," rejoined the merchant, endeavoring to capture the good will of Garin. "I reasoned thus with my daughter: Suppose my whole fortune were placed on board a vessel; it goes down; I lose all my wealth; I find myself in the same position that I am in to-dav: but so far from allowing myself to be discouraged, I start to work anew with fresh vigor to sustain my child. Is not that the better choice, worthy bailiff? Would you not do likewise?"

"You never will be reduced to that, Bezenecq the Rich. You have inexhaustible resources."

"You love to banter; you love to give me that surname of 'Rich,' to me, now no less poor than Job."

"No, no; I do not banter. But let's return to the torture. I was saying that if the first trial failed to convince a stubborn fellow to give up his goods, he is then put through the second torture, which I shall now explain," and Garin, keeping the hand of the merchant, conducted him to the iron prong. "You see this prong? It is of well-beaten metal, strong enough to hold the weight of an ox."

"I readily believe it. That hook is, indeed, of large dimensions——"

"Our stubborn guest having resisted the trial of the carcan, he is hooked naked on this prong, either by the flesh of the back, or by the skin of his bowels, or by any other and more sensitive part of the body."

"Speak not so loud," implored the merchant, hardly able to restrain his indignation and horror, "my daughter might overhear you."

"You are right," answered the bailiff, with a sardonic smile; "your daughter's blushes must be spared. Well, now Bezenecq the Rich, think of it. I have seen stubborn fellows remain suspended from that hook by the skin for a whole hour, bleeding like a cow in the shambles, and still refuse to relinquish their goods! But they never resist the third trial, with which I am now about to entertain you, Bezenecq the Rich. Give me your ear, the description will interest you."

"Strange!" suddenly exclaimed the merchant, interrupting Garin the Seaf-eater. "I smell smoke. Whence does the smell proceed?"

"Father, there is a fire!" cried out Isoline, horrified. "They are making a fire under the iron bars!"

The bourgeois of Nantes turned around sharply and saw the heaped-up combustibles under the gridiron beginning to take fire. Several tongues of flame lighted with their ruddy glow the black walls of the cell, while forcing themselves through thick columns of smoke. A frightful suspicion flashed through the mind of the merchant, but he dared not even allow his thoughts to dwell upon them; and, wishing to comfort his daughter, said to her: "Be not afraid, you dear bundle of fears, that fire is built to drive off the chill in this cell; we may have to spend the night here. I was thanking the worthy bailiff for his thoughtfulness." But immediately upon this answer, uttered only in order to reassure his daughter, the merchant, shivering, despite himself with fear, turned to Garin: "Speaking truly, why is that fire made under the gridiron?"

"Merely to give you an idea of the omnipotence of this last test, Bezenecq the Rich. I now commence the description."

"It is superfluous. I take your word for it."

"A fire is built under the gridiron, as they are doing now; when the fire has ceased to shoot up flames, a necessary precaution, and consists of a bed of live coals, the recalcitrant patient is stretched naked upon the gridiron, and he is kept there with the aid of those rings and iron chains. At the end of a few instants the skin of the patient, red and shriveling, rips up, bleeds, then turns black. I have seen the hot coals patter with fat that, clotted with blood, dripped from the body of men even less fat than you, Bezenecq the Rich."

"Hold on, bailiff! I must confess to you my heart fails me, my head reels at the mere thought of such infliction," said the bourgeois of Nantes, shivering from head to foot. "I am ready to faint. Let me out of this cell with my daughter. I have assigned to your master my whole fortune. You have taken everything——"

"Come, come, Bezenecq the Rich," broke in the bailiff, "a man who empties himself as easily as you did at the first word, and

without having suffered the least tortures, must have reserved other riches. That's what we'll learn all about in a moment."

"I? I have reserved part of my fortune!" exclaimed the merchant, struck almost speechless with amazement. "I have given you all, down to my last piece."

"You observed, my wily friend, that despite the assignment of all the property that you were credited with having, I continued to call you Bezenecq the Rich. I feel certain you still merit the name. Come, now! You must disgorge. Come, let's have the rest of your fortune."

"Upon the salvation of my soul, I have nothing left! I have given you all I possess."

"May not the three tests draw from you some admission to the contrary?"

"What tests are you speaking of?"

"The tests of the carcan, of the hook and of the gridiron. Yes, if you do not surrender to me the other property that you are hiding from us, you will undergo the three tests under the very eyes of your daughter," and saying this, Garin the Serf-eater raised his voice in such a way that Isoline, hearing his threats, darted through the gaolers and threw herself distracted at the feet of the bailiff, crying: "Mercy! Mercy upon my father! Have pity upon us!"

"Mercy depends upon him," said Garin, imperturbably. "Let him surrender to our seigneur what he still holds in reserve."

"Father!" cried out the young girl, "I know not what the extent of your wealth is. But if, in your tenderness for me, you sought to reserve aught to shelter me against poverty, I conjure you give it all! Oh, dear father, surrender everything!"

"You hear!" resumed Garin the Serf-eater, smiling fiendishly upon the couple, and seeing the demoralizing effect upon the merchant of the imprudent words that terror had drawn from Isoline, "I am not the only one to suspect you of hiding from us a part of your treasures, Bezenecq the Rich. Like a good father

you have sought to keep a fat dower for your daughter. Come, now, you must give us the dower!"

"Garin," one of the gaolers approached to notify the bailiff, "the coals are red hot. They may go out if you put the man through the trials of the carcan and the hook."

"As a favor to this young girl I shall be generous," said Garin. "The gridiron test will be enough, but stir the coals. And now answer, Bezenecq the Rich. I ask you for the last time, yes or no, will you give all you possess to my seigneur, the Count of Plouernel, including your daughter's dower?"

"It is my daughter whom I shall make the answer to," answered the merchant, in a solemn voice. "Gaolers will not believe me;" and addressing Isoline in a voice broken with tears: "I swear to you, my child, by the sacred memory of your mother, by my tenderness for you, by all the pleasures you have afforded me since your birth,—I swear to you, by the salvation of my soul, I have not a denier left; I have surrendered all to the Seigneur of Plouernel!"

"Oh, father, I believe you!" exclaimed the girl at his feet, and turning to Garin, she extended her hands towards him in prayer: "You have heard my father's oath; you may join mine to it."

"I hold Bezenecq the Rich incapable of leaving his daughter thus penniless," retorted the bailiff. Turning then to the gaolers: "He will now have to confess to us. Strip him, stretch him on the gridiron and stir the coals. Let the brand flame up."

The men of the seigneur of Plouernel threw themselves upon Bezenecq the Rich. Despite the resistance and the heart-rending, desperate cries of his daughter, whom they brutally held back, they stripped the bourgeois of Nantes, spread him upon the gridiron, and, by means of the iron chains, fastened him over the burning coals. "Oh, my father!" exclaimed Bezenecq, "I

have disregarded your advice . . . I now undergo the punishment for my cowardice . . . for my selfishness . . . I die under the torture for having been afraid to die arms in hand at the head of the serfs in revolt against the Frankish seigneurs . . . Triumph, Neroweg! Yet, perchance, the terrible day of reprisals will come to the sons of Joel!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESCUE.

In her apartment, lighted by a lamp, Azenor the Pale was engaged in the preparation of the magical philter, promised by her to the seigneur of Plouernel. After blowing some powder on a fluid that she had poured into a flagon, she pulled out of a chest a little vial, whose contents she drank. Laying down the vial, she remarked with a sinister smile: "Now, Neroweg, you may come . . . I am ready for you." Then, taking up the flagon, half full with a solution of several powders, she proceeded: "This flagon must now be filled with blood . . . the imagination of these ferocious brutes must be struck . . . come . . ." she added with a sigh, turning towards the turret where the little Colombaik was secreted. Raising the curtain that masked the alcove, Azenor saw before her the innocent little creature huddled in a lump in a corner, and silently weeping. "Come," said the sorceress to him in a sweet voice, "come to me." The son of Fergan the Quarryman obeyed, he rose and advanced timidly. Wan, thin, broken with want, his pale mien had, like his mother's, Joan the Hunchback's, an inexpressible charm of kindness. "Must you always be sad?" inquired Azenor, sitting down and drawing the child near to her and to a table on which lay a poniard. "Why do you always weep?" The little fellow wept afresh. "What's the cause of your sorrow?"

"My mother, my father," faltered the child, without ceasing to weep, "I do not see them any more!"

"You love your mother and father very much?" Instead of answering the sorceress, the poor little one threw himself sobbing upon her neck. The woman could not resist the impulse of re-

sponding to the childish prompting of a caress, and she embraced Colombaik at the very moment when, fearing he had been disrespectful to Azenor, the child was about to drop on his knees before her. Sinking upon the floor, he broke out into copious tears. The young woman, more and more moved, silently contemplated Colombaik, murmuring to herself: "No, no. . . . I lack courage. . . . I shall not kill that poor child, a few drops of his blood will be enough for the philter." Already her hand approached the poniard on the table, when suddenly her ear caught an unusual noise in the turret. It was like the scraping of a chain drawn with difficulty over an iron bar. The sorceress, alarmed, pushed the child back and ran toward the turret at the moment that Fergan the Quarryman stepped in, pale, bathed in perspiration and holding in his hand his iron pick. Azenor drew back, dumb with stupor and fear, while Colombaik, with a cry of joy, rushed to the quarryman, holding up his arms to him and calling: "My father! my father!" Beside himself with happiness, Fergan dropped his iron bar, took up the child in his robust arms, and, raising him to his breast, pressed him passionately, interrogating the face of Colombaik with inexpressible anxiety, while the child, taking between his little hands the gruff face of the quarryman, covered it with kisses, muttering: "Good father! Oh, good father! I see you again at last!"

The serf, without noticing the presence of the sorceress, devoured Colombaik with his eyes. Presently he observed, with a profound sigh of relief: "He is pale, he has been weeping, but he does not seem to have suffered; they can't have hurt him!" Embracing Colombaik with frenzy, he repeated several times: "My poor child! How happy your mother will be!" But his paternal alarms being calmed, he remembered that he was not alone, and not doubting that Azenor was the sorceress, whose dreaded name had reached as far as the serfs of the seigniory, he put his child down, took up again his pick, approached the young woman slowly with a savage mien and said to her: "So,

it is you, who have children kidnapped to serve your diabolical sorceries?" and with glistening eyes he raised his iron bar with both hands. "You will now die, infernal witch!"

"Father, do not kill her!" cried out the child impetuously, clasping the quarryman's legs with both his hands. "Oh, do not kill this good lady who was embracing me just as you came in!"

Fergan looked at Azenor, who, somber, pensive, her arms crossed upon her palpitating breast, seemed to brave death. Turning to the child: "Was this woman embracing you?"

"Yes, father; and since I have been here she has been kind to me. She has sought to console me. She even often rocked me in her arms."

"Why, then," said the quarryman to the sorceress, "did you have my child kidnapped? What have you to say!"

Azenor the Pale, without answering the question of the serf, and pursuing the thought that turned in her head, said: "Where does the passage run out through which you have penetrated to this turret?"

"What's that to you!"

The young woman stepped to a cabinet of massive oak, took from it a casket, opened it, and displaying before the quarryman the gold pieces that it was filled with, said: "Take this casket and let me accompany you. You have been able to enter this donjon by a secret passage, you will be able to get out again. We shall escape together from this accursed den. I pay a rich ransom."

"You . . . you mean to accompany me?"

"I wish to flee from this castle, where I am a prisoner, and run to rejoin at Angers William IX., Duke of Aquitaine——" Stopping short and leaning her ear towards the door, Azenor made a sign of silence to Fergan, and proceeded in a whisper: "I hear voices and steps on the staircase. Someone is coming up here. . . . It is Neroweg!"

"The count!" exclaimed the quarryman, with savage joy, step-

ping towards the door: "Oh, Worse than a Wolf, you will no longer bite! I shall kill the wretch!"

"Keep still or we are lost," interrupted Azenor in a low voice. "The Count is not alone; think of your child!" and pointing with rapid gesture to the cabinet of massive oak, she hastily whispered to the serf: "Push that piece of furniture across the door. Be quick! We shall have time to flee! Your enemy, Neroweg, has only a few more steps to climb! I hear his spurs clank upon the stone floor!"

Fergan, thinking only of the safety of his child, followed the advice of Azenor, and, thanks to the herculean strength he was endowed with, succeeded in pushing the massive piece of furniture across the door, which, thus barricaded, could not swing open into the room. The sorceress hastily wrapped herself in a mantle; took from the cabinet whence she had extracted the casket, a little leathern bag containing precious stones, and said to the quarryman, holding the casket out to him: "Take this gold and let's flee."

"Carry your gold, yourself! I shall carry my child and my pick to defend him!" answered the serf, taking up his iron bar with one hand, and placing on his left arm little Colombaik, who held fast by his father's neck. At that very moment the fugitives heard from without the sound of the key that turned in the lock, followed by the voice of the seigneur of Plouernel: "Who is holding that door back inside? Is that one of your enchantments, accursed sorceress?"

While the Count was beating against the door, and, redoubling his imprecations, vainly sought to force it, the quarryman, his son and Azenor, gathered in the turret, prepared to flee by the secret passage. One of the slabs of the flooring, being swung aside by means of a counterweight and chains wound around an iron axis, exposed the first step of a ladder so narrow that it could barely allow passage to one person at a time, and of such a slope at that spot that its first ten wrungs could be cleared only

by sliding down almost on the back from step to step. Azenor was the first to undertake the narrow passage; the little Colombaik imitated her; the two were followed by Fergan, who then readjusted the counterweight. The stone slab, back again in its place, again masked the secret passage. This steep portion of the ladder was wrought in an abutment of the turret, where its base projected beyond the wall of the donjon. Its foot connected with the narrow stone spiral, which, wrought in the ten-foot thick wall, descended to the lowest depths of the donjon. At each landing, a skilfully masked outlet opened upon this secret passage, lighted by not a ray from without. But Fergan, equipped with his tinder box, punk and wick, of the kind that he helped himself with in the quarries, lighted the passage, and, with his iron pick in one hand, his light in the other, preceded his son and Azenor down the stone spiral. The descent was but slowly effected.

Presently the fugitives, leaving above them the level of the landing where the hall of the stone table was located, and which was situated on the ground floor, arrived at the place that corresponded with the subterranean cells. Here the passage served not merely as a means of retreat in case of a siege, it also afforded the chatelain an opportunity to spy upon the prisoners and overhear their confidential communications. By its construction, the cell of Bezenecq the Rich gave special facilities for such espionage. Furthermore, a slab three feet square by two inches thick, fastened in a strong oaken frame on hinges, constituted a sort of stone door, undistinguishable from the inside of the somber apartment, but easy to push open from without. Thus the seigneur reserved to himself an access to those subterraneous chambers, unknown even to the dwellers of the castle. Above the opening and within the cell was sculptured that hideous mask, whose sight had frightened the daughter of the merchant. The two eyes and the mouth of this grim figure, bored through the full thickness of the wall and exteriorly chiseled in the form of

a niche, permitted the spy, posted at that place of concealment, to see the prisoners and overhear what they said. Thus it happened a few hours before that Fergan, climbing up by the light of his wick, had overheard the conversation between the Bishop of Nantes and Jeronimo, the legate of the Pope, and then that of the bourgeois of Nantes and his daughter. The fugitives were now on a level with the cell of Bezenecq, when suddenly brilliant rays of light shot through the openings in the stone mask, proceeding from a light within.

Fergan was in advance of his child and Azenor. He halted at the sound of rawkish peels of laughter—frightful, like those of a maniac. The serf peeped through the holes pierced in the eyes of the mask, and this was what he saw by the light of a lantern placed upon the ground. Two naked corpses, the one suspended by the neck from the iron gibbet fastened in the wall, the other by the groins from the iron prong. The former, rigid, horribly distended and dislocated by the enormous weight of the stone attached to his feet; the latter, hooked by the flesh upon the sharp prong that penetrated his entrails, was bent backwards with his arms dangling against his legs. These victims, captured shortly before, from a new troop of travelers on the territory of the seigneur of Plouernel and taken to this cell, better fitted out than the others with instruments of torture, did not survive the experience. The corpse of Bezenecq the Rich was chained to the gridiron above the dying embers of the coal fire. The agonies of that unhappy man had been so excruciating that his members, held fast by the iron bands, had been convulsively distended. Undoubtedly at the moment of expiring he had made a supreme effort to turn his head towards his daughter, so as to die with her in sight. The face of the merchant, blackened, frightful to behold, retained the expression of his agony. A few steps from the corpse of her father, cowering upon the straw bed, her knees held in her arms, Isoline swayed to and fro, emitting at intervals rythmic peels of maniacal laughter. She had

gone crazy. Fergan, moved with pity, was considering how to deliver the daughter of Bezenecq, when the door of the cell opened and Gonthram, the eldest son of Neroweg, stepped in, a torch in his hands and his cheeks of purple. His eyes, his unsteady walk, all announced a high stage of inebriety. Approaching Isoline, he struck against the gridiron, where lay the corpse of the bourgeois of Nantes. Unmoved by that spectacle, Gonthram stepped towards the young girl, seized her rudely by the arm, and said in a maudlin voice: "Come, follow me!" The demented girl seemed not to hear, she did not even raise her eyes, and continued swaying to and fro and to laugh. "You are quite gay," observed the whelp; "I also am gay. Come upstairs. We shall laugh together!"

"Oh, traitor!" broke in a new personage, precipitating himself out of breath into the cell. "I made no doubt what you had in your mind when I saw you leave the table the moment my father went up to the sorceress!" And throwing himself upon his brother, Guy, the second son of Neroweg, cried out: "If you want the girl, you will have to pay for her with your blood!"

"Vile bastard! You, the son of my mother's chaplain! You dare to threaten me!" In his rage, increased by intoxication, Gonthram raised his burning torch, struck his brother with it in the face and drew his sword. Guy, uttering a furious imprecation, also drew his sword. The struggle was short. Guy fell lifeless at the feet of his brother, who exclaimed: "The bastard is dead. I am the better man. The girl is mine!" and rushing back to Isoline: "Now, you are mine!"

"No!" resounded a menacing voice, and before Gonthram, who had taken up the daughter of Bezenecq in his arms, had time to turn around, he received over his head a crushing blow with an iron bar, throwing him down upon his brother's body. From the place of concealment, where Fergan had stood, he saw the commencement of the fratricidal strife and had entered the cell by the secret opening when the fight was at its height between the

two sons of Neroweg. Time was passing. Some of the men of the seigneur of Plouernel, observing the prolonged absence of the two whelps, might at any moment come down. Fergan took the poor maniac by the hand and led her to the secret opening. "Now, stoop, dear child, and get through the aperture." Isoline remained motionless. Renouncing all hope of being understood by her, Fergan pressed his two hands with force upon the shoulders of the child. "Woman," the serf cried out to Azenor the Pale, who had remained outside of the cell, contemplating the two bleeding bodies of the sons of Neroweg, "take the hand of this poor girl and try to draw her out."

"Why take this insane woman along?" said Azenor to Fergan. "She will retard our march and increase the difficulties of our flight."

"I wish to save this unfortunate being."

Sustained by Fergan, who preceded Colombaik, carrying the lighted wick, Isoline descended with difficulty the steps of the staircase. Penetrating ever deeper into the bowels of the earth, the fugitives arrived at the bottom of the stone spiral that connected with a tunnel, bored through the living rock at such a depth that, passing under the sheet of water of the gigantic pit, from the midst of which the donjon rose, it issued out into the open half a league away from the castle at a place concealed amid tumbling bowlders and brushwood.

CHAPTER X.

CUCKOO PETER.

Day was slowly breaking upon the fateful night during which the fugitives effected their escape from the manor of Plouernel. Joan the Hunchback, seated at the threshold of her hut, which lay at the extremity of the village, incessantly turned her eyes, red with weeping, towards the road by which Fergan, absent since the previous morning in quest of Colombaik, was expected. Suddenly the female serf heard from afar a great tumult, caused by the approach of a large crowd of people. At intervals confused and prolonged clamors were heard rising above the din, frantically crying out: "God wills it! God wills it!" Finally Joan saw a crowd of people turning a road that led to the village. At the head marched a monk mounted on a white mule, whose bones protruded from its skin, together with a man-at-arms astride of a small black horse, not less lean than the mule of his companion.

The monk, called by some Peter the Hermit, but by most Cuckoo Peter, wore a tattered brown frock, on the left sleeve of which near the shoulder was sewn a cross of red material, the rallying sign of the Crusaders on the holy march of the Crusade. A rope served him for a belt. His unhosed feet, shod in worn-out sandals, rested on wooden stirrups. His cowl, pushed back, exposed a bald head, boney and grimy like the rest of his face, bronzed by the hot sun of Palestine. His hollow eyes, glistening with a somber fire, flamed from the depths of their orbits. His haggard looks expressed savage fanaticism. In one hand he held a cross of rude wood, hardly planed, with which ever and anon he smote the crupper of his mule to quicken its pace.

The companion of Cuckoo Peter was a Gascon knight sur-

named Walter the Pennyless. Of a physiognomy as grotesque and jovial as that of the monk was savage and funereal, the mere sight of the knight provoked a smile. His eyes, sparkling with mischief, his inordinately long nose, that almost kissed the chin, his rakish mouth, slit from ear to ear, his features hinged on a perpetual grin, amused from the start, and when he spoke, his buffoonery and his mirthful sallies, delivered with southern spirit, carried hilarity to its highest pitch. Wearing on his head a rusty, cracked and knocked-in casque, ornamented with a bunch of goose feathers, his chest covered with a breastplate no less rusty, no less cracked and no less knocked in than his casque, Walter the Pennyless also wore the red cross on the left sleeve of his patched cloak. Shod in cowhides, fastened with cords around his long heron legs, he bore himself with as triumphant an air on his lean black hirsute horse, that he named the "Sun of Glory," as if he bestrode a mettlesome charger. His long sword, sheathed in wood, named by him the "Sweetheart of the Faith," hung from his leathern shoulder belt. On his left arm he bore a shield of tin, covered with vulgar pictures. One of these, filling the upper part, represented a man clad in rags, knapsack on back and pilgrim staff in hand, departing on the Crusade, as indicated by the cross of red stuff painted on his shoulder. The lower picture represented the same man, no longer wan and haggard, no longer dressed in tatters, but splendidly fitted out, bursting with fat, and spread upon a bed, covered with purple cloth, beside a beautiful Saracen woman, with nothing on but collar and bracelets. A Saracen, wearing a turban and humbly kneeling, poured out the contents of a coffer full of gold at the foot of the bed where the Crusader was frolicking with his female bedfellow in an obscene posture. The very crudity of the idea expressed by these vulgar pictures was calculated to make a lively impression upon the childish imagination of the multitude.

At the heels of Cuckoo Peter and Walter the Pennyless fol-

lowed a mob of men, women and children, serfs and villeins, mendicants and vagabonds, prostitutes and professional thieves, the latter distinguishable by their cropped ears, as well as the murderers, some of whom, in a spirit of sanguinary ostentation, bedecked their breasts with pieces of black cloth bearing in white one, or two, sometimes three skulls—a sinister emblem, denoting that the holy Crusade gave absolution for murder, however frequently committed by the criminal. All bore the red cross on the left sleeve. Women carried on their backs their children too young to walk, or too tired to proceed on the route. Other women, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, leaned on the arms of their husbands, loaded with a bag containing all their havings. The least poor of the Crusaders traveled on donkeys, on mules or in wagons. They carried all their belongings with them, even to their pigs and chickens. The latter, fastened by the legs to the rails of the wagons, kept up a deafening cackle. Other poor people dragged their milk goats after them, or a loaded sheep, or even one or more cows.

Contrasting with this tattered multitude, here and there some couples were seen, the cavalier in the saddle, his paramour on the crupper, happy to escape through that holy pilgrimage the jealous or disturbing surveillance of a father or a husband. These runaways also took the route of the Orient. Among them was Eucher with the handsome Yolande, dispossessed of her father's heritage by the seigneur of Plouernel. They had sold a few jewels, given one-half the proceeds to Yolande's mother, and with the rest the lovers bought a mule on which to follow the Crusaders to Jerusalem.

This mob, consisting of three or four thousand persons, moving from Angers and surrounding localities, recruited its forces all along the route with new pilgrims. The faces of the serfs and villeins breathed joy. For the first time in their lives they left an accursed land, soaked in the sweat of their brow and in their blood, and to which, from generation to generation, they

and their fathers had been chained down by the will of the seigneurs. At last they tasted a day of freedom, an inestimable happiness to the slave. Their joyous cries, their disorderly songs, gross, licentious, resounded far and wide, and ever and anon they repeated with frenzy the words, hurled out by Cuckoo Peter in a hoarse voice: "Death to the Saracens! Let's march to the deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre! God wills it!" At other times they echoed the Gascon cavalier, Walter the Pennyless: "To Jerusalem, the city of marvels! Ours is Jerusalem, the city of pleasures, of good wine, of beautiful women, of gold and of sunshine! Ours is the Promised Land!"

Singing, dancing, uproarious with gladness, the troop crossed the village and passed by the hut of Fergan. The serfs, instead of betaking themselves to the fields for their hard day's labor, ran ahead of the train, shut in at that moment between two lines of ruined houses that bordered the road. Joan, standing at the threshold of her door, looked at this mob as it passed, with a mixture of astonishment and fear. A big scamp of a gallows bird, nicknamed by his companions Corentin the Gibbet-cheater, was giving his arm to a young wench that went by the name of Perrette the Ribald. She noticed poor Joan the Hunchback at her door and cried out to her, alluding to her deformity: "Halloa, you there, who carry your baggage on your back, come with us to Jerusalem; you will be admired there as one of the prodigies among the other marvels!"

"By the navel of the Pope! By the buttocks of Satan! You are right, my ribald!" cried the Gibbet-cheater. "There can be no hunchbacks in Jerusalem, a land of beautiful Saracen women, according to our friend Walter the Pennyless. We shall exhibit this hunchback for money. Come on!" said the bandit, seizing Joan by the arm, "follow us, you camel!"

"Yes, yes," added Perrette the Ribald, laughing loudly and seizing the other arm of the quarryman's wife, "come to Jerusalem; come to the land of marvels!"

"Leave me alone!" said the poor woman, struggling to disen-

gage herself. "For pity's sake, leave me! I am expecting my husband and my child!"

Forced to follow her persecutors, and carried, despite herself, by the stream of the Crusaders, Joan, fearing to be stifled or crushed under foot by the crowd, sought no longer to struggle against the current. Suddenly, instead of proceeding onward, the mob swayed back, and these words ran from mouth to mouth: "Silence! Cuckoo Peter and Walter the Pennyless are going to speak! Silence!" A deep silence ensued. Halting in the middle of a large open space, where, gaping with curiosity, the serfs of the village stood gathered together, the monk and his companion prepared themselves to harangue these poor rustic plebs. Cuckoo Peter reined in his white mule and rising in his stirrups, he screamed in a hoarse yet penetrating voice, addressing the serfs of the seigniory of Plouernel: "Do you, Christian folks, know what is going on in Palestine? The divine tomb of the Saviour is in the hands of the Saracens! The Holy Sepulchre of our Lord is in the power of the infidels! Woe is us! Woe! Malediction! Malediction!" And the monk struck his chest, tore his frock, rolled his hollow eyes in their sockets, ground his teeth, foamed at the mouth, went through a thousand contortions on his mule, and resumed with increased fury: "The infidel is lord in Jerusalem, the Holy City! The miscreant insults the tomb of Christ with his presence! And you, Christians, my brothers, you remain indifferent before so horrible a sacrilege! Before such an abomination——"

"No, no!" cried back with one voice the mob of the Crusaders. "Death to the infidels! Let's deliver the tomb! Let's march to Jerusalem, the city of marvels and of beauty! God wills it! God wills it!"

The serfs of the village, ignorant, besotted, timid, opened wide their eyes and ears, and looked at one another, never before having heard the name of Jerusalem or of the Saracens mentioned, and unabled to explain the fury and contortions of the

monk. Accordingly, Martin the Prudent, the same who, two days before, had ventured to depict to the bailiff the sufferings of his fellows, timidly said to Cuckoo Peter: "Holy patron, seeing that our Lord Jesus Christ sits on his throne in heaven, together with God the Father in eternal glory, what can it be to him whether his tomb be in the hands of the people whom you call Saracens? Kindly enlighten us."

"That's what we would like to know," joined another serf, a young fellow who looked less stupid than the others. "We want to know that first."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Walter the Pennyless. "By my valiant sword, the Sweetheart of the Faith! Here have we a rude questioner. What's your name, my brave lad?"

"My name is Colas the Bacon-cutter."

"As surely as ham is the friend of wine, you must be a relative of my friend Simon the Porkrind-scraper," replied the Gascon knight, amidst peals of laughter from the serfs, who were delighted by this sally. "So, then, you would like to know, my worthy Colas the Bacon-cutter, what it can matter to Jesus Christ, enthroned in heaven with the Eternal Father and the sweet dove, the Holy Ghost, if his sepulchre is held by the Saracens?"

"Yes, seigneur," rejoined the serf; "because, if that displeases him, how is it that, seeing he is God and omnipotent, he does not exterminate them? Why does he not turn those Saracens into pulp at a single wafture of his hand?"

"Woe is us! Abomination! Desolation of the world!" ejaculated Cuckoo Peter, breaking in upon the Gascon adventurer, who was about to answer. "Oh, ye people without faith, ingrates, impious and rebellious children! Jesus Christ gave his blood to redeem you. Is that so or not?"

"Serfs were our fathers, serfs are we, serfs will our children be," retorted Colas the Bacon-cutter. "We have not been redeemed, holy father, as you claim."

The answer of young Colas unquestionably embarrassed the monk; he shot at him threatening glances, writhed on his mule and resumed in a thundering voice: "Malediction! Desolation! Oh, ye of little faith! Jesus has given you his blood to redeem you, and you, in return, refuse to shed the blood of those accursed Saracens, who every day outrage his sepulchre! This is what the divine Saviour has said. . . . Do you hear? . . . Here is what he said. . . . Listen . . ."

Walter the Pennyless here broke in with his own harangue: "Those accursed Saracens are gorged with gold, with precious stones, with silver vessels; they inhabit a marvelous country where there is a profusion without the trouble of cultivation: Golden wheat fields, delicious fruits, exquisite wines, sweethearts of all complexions! One must go there to believe it! Think of it! Winter is unknown, spring eternal. The poorest of those infidel dogs have homes of white marble and enchanting gardens, embellished with limpid fountains. The beggars, clad in silk, play tennis with rubies and diamonds." A murmur of astonishment, then of admiration ran through the serfs. Their eyes fixed, their mouths agape, their hands clasped, they listened with increasing avidity to the Gascon adventurer. "Such is the miraculous country inhabited by those infidel dogs, and the Christians, the beloved children of the holv Catholic Church, inhabit dens, eat black bread, drink brackish water, shiver under a sky frozen in winter and rainy in summer. No, let all the devils take it! Let my beloved brothers come to the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre, exterminate the infidels, and then they will have for their reward the prodigious lands of Palestine! Theirs be Jerusalem, the city of silver ramparts, with golden gates, studded with carbuncles! Theirs be the wines, the beautiful maids, the riches of the accursed Saracens! If you wish all that, good people, it is yours!" Then, turning to Peter the Hermit, "Not so, holy man?"

"It is the truth," answered Cuckoo Peter; "it is the truth. *The goods of the sinner are reserved for the just.*"

In the measure that the adroit lieutenant of Cuckoo Peter had held up to the dazzled eyes of the poor villagers the ravishing picture of the delights and riches of Palestine, a good number of those famished serfs, clad in tatters and who all their lives had not crossed the boundaries of the seigniory of Plouernel, began to tremble with ardent covetousness and feverish hope. Others, more timid or less credulous, hesitated in believing those marvels. Of these old Martin the Prudent was the organ. Turning to his fellows: 'My friends, that knight, on the back of that little black horse that looks like an ass, has said to you: 'One must go to that country to believe these marvels by seeing them with his own eyes.' Now, then, it is my opinion that it is better to believe them than to go and see them. It is not enough to depart for those regions. One must be certain of provisions on the route, and to return from such a distance."

"Old Martin is right," put in several serfs. "Let's take his advice and stay home."

"Besides," added another serf, "those Saracens will not allow themselves to be plundered without resisting. There will be blows received . . . men killed . . . thousands of them."

These views, exchanged aloud, no wise troubled the Gascon adventurer. He drew his famous sword, the Sweetheart of the Faith, and indicating with its point the pictures that ornamented his shield, he cried out in his cheerful and catching accent: "Good friends, see you this poor man with his cane in his hand? He departed for the Holy Land, his pouch as empty as his belly, his knap-sack as hollow as his cheeks. He is so ragged that one would think a pack of dogs had been at him! Look at him, the poor fellow, he is really to be pitied. What misery! What pinching poverty, my friends!"

"Yes, yes," the serfs exclaimed together, "he is really to be pitied."

"And now, my friends, what see you here?," resumed the Gascon adventurer, touching with the point of his sword the second picture on his shield. "Here is our very man, one time poor! You do not recognize him. I do not wonder, he is no longer the same, and yet it is himself, round of cheeks, clad like a seigneur and bursting his skin. Beside him lies a beautiful female Saracen slave, while at his feet a male Saracen comes to surrender his treasure! Well, now, my friends, this man, once so poor, so ragged at home, is you, is I, is all of us, and that same friend so plump, so sleek, so well clad, that, again, will be you, will be I, will be all of us, once we are in Palestine. Come, then, on the Crusade! Come and deliver the tomb of the Saviour! The devil take the rags, the rickety huts, the straw litters and the black bread! Let ours be marble palaces, silk robes, purple carpets, goblets of delicious wines, full purses, and beauteous Saracen women to rock us to sleep with their songs! Come to the Crusade!"

"Come, come!," cried out Cuckoo Peter. "If you are guilty of robbery, of arson, of murder, of prostitution, if you have committed adultery, fratricide or parricide—all your sins will be remitted. Come to the Crusade! Do you need an example, my brothers? William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, an impious fellow, a ravisher, a debauché who counts his crimes and adulteries by the thousands, William IX, that bedeviled criminal, departs tomorrow from the city of Angers for Palestine, white as a paschal lamb."

"And I, white as a swan!" interjected Corentin the Gibbet-cheater. "God wills it! Let's depart for Jerusalem!"

"And I as white as a dove!" said Perette the Ribald, with a peal of laughter. "God wills it! Let's depart for Jerusalem!"

"Yes, yes; let's depart on the Crusade!" cried out the more daring of the villagers, intoxicated with hope. "Let's depart for Jerusalem." Others, less resolute, less venturesome, and of these was the larger number, took the advice of Martin the Prudent, fearing to stake their fate, whatever their present misery, upon

the cast of a dangerous voyage and of unknown countries. They deemed insane the exaltation of their fellows in servitude. Finally, others, still hesitated to take so grave a step, and Colas the Bacon-cutter addressed Walter the Pennyless: "To depart is easy enough. But what will our seigneur say to that? He has forbidden us to leave his domains on pain of having our feet cut off. And he will surely have the order carried out!"

"Your seigneur!" answered the Gascon adventurer breaking out in a horse-laugh. "Scorn your seigneur as you would a wolf caught in a trap! Ask these good people who follow us whether they have bothered about their seigneurs!"

"No, no, the devil take the seigneurs!" cried out the Crusaders. "We are going to Jerusalem. God wills it! God wills it!"

"What!" put in Cuckoo Peter, "the Eternal wants a thing, and a seigneur, a miserable earthworm will dare oppose His will! Oh, desolation! Eternal malediction upon the seigneur, upon the father, upon the husband, upon the mother, who would dare resist the holy impulse of their children, their wives, their serfs, who run to the deliverance of the tomb of the Lord!"

These words of Peter the Hermit were received with acclamation by the Crusaders. The beautiful Yolande and her lover, Eucher, as well as other loving couples, cried out in emulation and louder than the others: "God wills it! There is no will above his!"

"Master Walter the Pennyless," resumed Colas the Bacon-cutter, scratching the back of his ear, "is it far from here to Jerusalem?"

"The distance is from sin to safety!" bellowed Cuckoo Peter. "The road is short for the believers, endless for the impious! Are you a Christian or a miscreant? Are you an idolater or a good Catholic?"

Colas the Bacon-cutter, finding himself, no more than some other serfs who still hesitated, sufficiently instructed by the monk's answer on the distance of the journey, asked again:

"Father, it is said to be a long ways from here to Nantes. Is it as far to Jerusalem?"

"Oh, man of little faith!" answered Peter the Hermit, "dare you measure the road that leads to Paradise and to the Holy Virgin?"

"By the four swift feet of my good horse, the Sun of Glory! They are thinking of the length of the road!" exclaimed Walter the Pennyless. "See here, my friends, does the bird that escapes from its cage inquire the length of the road when it can fly to freedom? Does not the ass in the mill, turning his grindstone and tramping from dawn to dusk in the same circle, travel as much as the stag that roves through the woods at pleasure? Oh, my good friends, is it not better, instead of, like the ass of the mill, incessantly to tramp this seigniorial soil unto which you are chained, to march in search of adventures, free, happy like the stag in the forest, and every day see new countries?"

"Yes, yes," replied Colas, "the stag in the forest is better off than the ass in the mill. Let's depart for Palestine!"

"Yes, let's depart for Palestine!" the cry now went up from several other villagers. "On to that land of marvels!"

"My friends, be careful what you do," insisted Martin the Prudent. "The ass in the mill at least receives in the evening his meager pittance. The stags of the forest do not pasture in herds, hence they find a sufficiency in the woods. But if you depart with this large troop, which swells as it marches, you will be thousands of thousands when you reach Jerusalem. Who, then, my friends, will feed you? Who is to lodge you on the road? Who is to furnish you with clothes and footwear?"

"And who is it that lodges and feeds the birds of the good God, man of little faith?" Cuckoo Peter exclaimed. "Do the birds carry their provisions with them? Do they not raid the harvests along their route, resting at night under the eaves of the houses? Answer, ye hardened sinners!"

"By the faith of the Gibbet-cheater, you may trust that man!" here put in Corentin. "As truly as Perrette is a daisy, our route

from Angers to this place has been but one continuous raid to us big birds on two legs. What feasts we have had? Poultry and pigeons! Hams and sausages! Pork and mutton! Tons of wine! Tons of hydromel! By my belly and my back, we have raided for everything on our passage, leaving behind us but bones to gnaw at and empty barrels to turn over!"

"And if those people were to complain," added Perrette the Ribald with her usual outburst of laughter, "we would answer them: 'Shut up, ninnies! Cuckoo Peter has read in the holy books that *'the goods of the sinner are reserved for the just!'* Are not we the *just,* we who are on the march to deliver the holy tomb? And are not you *sinners,* you who stay here stagnating in your cowardice? And if these ninnies said but a word, the Gibbet-cheater, backed by our whole band, would soon have convinced them with a thorough caning."

These sallies of Perrette and Corentin completed the conversion of those serfs who still hesitated. Seeing in the voyage but a long and merry junket, a goodly number of them, Colas the Bacon-cutter at their head, cried out in chorus: "Let's depart for Jerusalem, the country of beautiful girls, good wines and ingots of gold!"

"Onward, march, my friends! Trouble your heads neither about the road, nor about lodging, nor yet about food. The good God will provide!" cried Walter the Pennyless. "On the march! On the march! If you have provisions, take them along. Have you a donkey? mount him. Have you wagons? hitch on, and put wife and children in them. If you have nothing but your legs, gird up your loins, and on to Jerusalem! We are hundreds upon hundreds; we soon shall be thousands upon thousands; and presently we shall number hundreds of thousands. Upon our arrival in Palestine we shall find treasures and delights for all—beautiful women, good wine, rich robes, and lumps of gold in plenty!"

"And we shall all have gained eternal salvation! We shall have a seat in Paradise!" added Cuckoo Peter in a strident voice,

brandishing his wooden cross over his head. "Let's depart for Jerusalem! God wills it!"

"Forward, let's depart for Palestine!" cried out a hundred of the villagers, carried away by Colas, despite the prudent advice of Martin. These ill-starred men, a prey to a sort of delirium, ran to their huts and gathered up the little that they possessed. Some loaded their asses in haste; others, less poor, hitched a horse or a yoke of oxen to a wagon and placed their families on board; while Peter the Hermit and Walter the Pennyless, to the end of inflaming still more the ardor of these new recruits of the faith in the midst of their preparations for the journey, struck up the chant of the Crusades that was soon taken up in chorus by all the Crusaders:

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! City of marvels! Happiest among all cities! You are the subject of the vows of the angels! You constitute their happiness! You will be our delight!

"The wood of the cross is our standard. Let's follow that banner that marches on before, guided by the Holy Ghost!

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! City of marvels! Happiest among all cities! You are the subject of the vows of the angels! You constitute their happiness! You will be our delight!"

Joan the Hunchback, having succeeded in freeing herself from the hands of Corentin and his wench, had pushed herself not without great pains, out of the compact mob, and was about to start back to her humble home by cutting across the skirt of the village, intending to wait for the return of her husband and child, a return that she hardly ventured to hope for. Suddenly she turned deadly pale and tried to scream, but terror deprived her of her voice. From the somewhat raised ground where she stood, Joan saw, down the plain, Fergan carrying his son in his arms, and running with all his might towards the village, with Garin the Serf-eater at his heels. The latter, giving his horse the spurs, followed the serf, sword in hand. Several men-at-arms on foot, following at a distance the tracks of the bailiff, sought to make up to him in order to render him armed assistance. De-

spite his efforts to escape, Fergan led Garin by barely fifty paces. The lead was shortened from moment to moment. Already within but two paces, and believing the quarryman to be within reach of his sword, the bailiff had sought to strike him down by leaning over the neck of his horse. Thanks to several doublings, like those that hares make when pursued by the hound, Fergan escaped death. Making, finally, a desperate leap, he ran several steps straight ahead with indescribable swiftness, and then suddenly disappeared from the sight of Joan as if he had sunk into the bowels of the earth. A second later the poor woman saw Garin reining in his horse with great effort near the spot where the quarryman had just disappeared from view; he raised his sword heavenward, and then, instead of proceeding straight ahead, turned to the left and followed at a full gallop a hedge of green that traversed the valley diagonally. Joan then understood that her husband, having jumped with the child to the bottom of a deep trench, which the bailiff's horse could not clear, at the very moment when he would have been struck down by the bailiff, the latter had been compelled to ride along the edge of the trench to a point where he might cross it, in order to proceed to the village, where he counted upon capturing the quarryman. Joan feared lest her husband and child were hurt in the leap. But soon she saw her little Colombaik climb out of the trench with the aid of his little hand and supported by his father, whose arms only were visible. Presently Fergan also climbed out, picked up the child again, and carrying that dear load, continued to flee at a full run towards the village, which he aimed at reaching before the bailiff. Despite her weakness, Joan rushed forward to meet her child and her husband, and joined them. Fergan, without stopping and keeping the child in his arms, hurriedly said to his wife, almost out of breath and exhausted: "Let's reach the village. Let's get in ahead of Garin, and we shall be safe!"

"My dear Colombaik, you are here at last!" Joan said, while running beside the serf and devouring the child with her eyes,

forgetting at the sight of him both the present perils and the past, while Colombaik, smiling and reaching out his little arms, said: "Mother! mother! How happy am I to see you again! Dear, good mother!"

"Oh," said the serf while redoubling his efforts to gain the village before Garin, who was driving his horse at full speed, "had I not been delayed burying a dead woman at the egress of the tunnel, I would have been here before daybreak. We would have met to flee together."

"My child! They have not hurt you?" Joan was thinking only of her child, one of whose hands she had seized and was kissing while weeping with joy, and running beside her husband. At that moment the chant of the Crusaders' departure resounded from afar with renewed fervor: "Jerusalem! City of marvels!"

"What songs are these?" inquired the quarryman. "What big crowd is that, gathered yonder? Whence come all these people?"

"Those are people who are going, they say, to Jerusalem. A large number of the inhabitants of the village are following them. They are like crazy!"

"Then we are really saved!" exclaimed the quarryman, seized with a sudden thought. "Let's depart with them!"

"What, Fergan!" demanded Joan out of breath and exhausted with her precipitate gait. "We to go far away with our child!"

But the serf, who found himself at the most a hundred paces from the village, made no answer, and followed by Joan, he finally reached the crowd, into the midst of which he dived, holding Colombaik and exhausted with fatigue, while, muttering to his wife: "Oh, saved! We are saved!"

Garin, who had continued driving his horse along the trench until he reached a spot where he could cross, observed with astonishment the crowd of people that blocked his way and access to the village. Drawing near, he saw coming towards him several of the serfs who preferred their crushing servitude to the chances of a distant and unknown voyage. Among these was old Martin

the Prudent. Seeking to flatter the bailiff, he said to him trembling: "Good master Garin, we are not of those rebels who dare to flee from the lands of their seigneur to go to Palestine with that troop of Crusaders, that are traveling through the country. We do not intend to abandon the domain of our seigneur. We wish to work for him to our last day."

"S-death!" cried out the bailiff, forgetting the quarryman at the announcement of the desertion of a large number of the serfs. "The wretches who have thought of fleeing will be punished." The crowd, opening up before the horse of Garin, he reached the monk and Walter the Pennyless, who were pointed to him as the chiefs of the Crusaders. "By what right do you thus enter with a large troop upon the territory of my seigneur, Neroweg VI, sovereign Count of Plouernel?" Then, raising his voice still more and turning to the villagers: "Those of you, serfs and villeins, who had the audacity of following these vagabonds, shall have their hands and feet cut on the spot, like rebels——"

"Impious man! Blasphemer!" exclaimed Cuckoo Peter breaking in upon the bailiff in a thundering voice. "Dare you threaten the Christians who are on the march to deliver the tomb of the Lord? Woe be unto you!——"

"You frocked criminal," the bailiff in turn interrupted, boiling with rage, and drawing his sword, "you dare issue orders in the seigniory of my master!" Saying which, Garin, driving his horse towards the monk, raised his sword over him. But Peter the Hermit parried the move with his heavy wooden cross, and struck the bailiff such a hard blow with it over his casque, that the latter, dazed for a moment, let fall his sword.

"Death to the bandit, who would cut off the feet and hands of the avengers of Christ!" several voices cried out. "Death to him! Death!"

"Yes, death!" yelled the serfs of the village, who had made up their minds to depart for the Holy Land, and who abhorred the bailiff. "Death to Garin the Serf-eater! He shall eat none more!" With that, Colas the Bacon-cutter threw him from his

horse, and in a moment the bailiff, trodden under foot, was slaughtered and torn to pieces. The serfs broke his bones, cut off his head, and Colas the Bacon-cutter, taking up the livid head of the Serf-eater with the prong of his pitch-fork, raised the bleeding trophy above the mob. Carrying it on high, he rejoined the troop of the Crusaders, whereupon the crowd marched away singing at the top of their voices:

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! City of marvels! Happiest among all cities! You are the subject of the vows of the angels! You constitute their happiness! You will be our delight!

"The wood of the cross is our standard. Let's follow that banner that marches on before, guided by the Holy Ghost!

"God wills it! God wills it! God wills it."

PART II.

THE CRUSADE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SYRIAN DESERT.

The sun of Palestine inundates with its blinding and scorching light, a desert covered with reddish sand. As far as the eye reaches, not a house is seen, not a tree, not a bush, not a blade of grass, not a pebble. Not a sparrow could find shelter in this vast expanse. Everywhere a shifting sand, fine as ashes, radiates back in more torrid temperature the heat imparted to it by that flaming sun, vaulted by a fiery sky that dips in the western horizon into a zone of burning vapor. Here and yonder, half buried in the waves of sand that are periodically raised by the gales of these regions, appear the whitened bones of men and children, horses, asses, oxen and camels. The flesh of these bodies has been devoured by vultures, jackals and lions. The Saracen proverb is verified: "The Christians find here shelter only in the belly of the vultures, the jackals and the lions!" These decomposing human and other débris trace across the desert the route to Marhala, a city situated ten days' march from Jerusalem,—the holy city toward which converge the several armies of the Crusaders from Gaul, Germany, Italy and England, marching to the conquest of an empty tomb.

If in this solitude there are skeletons and corpses half devoured, there are also dying and living beings. Numerous are the dying, few, on the contrary, the living; and the latter would count themselves happy if the dead and the dying around them were the worst of their plight. Here are the Crusaders, who, in their credulity, left the year before the "ungrateful soil of the Occident" for the "miraculous land of the Orient," where they arrived after a voyage of eleven or twelve hundred leagues. The bulk of the army that left Gaul, then under the command

of Bohemund, Prince of Tarento, slowly melted away yonder, in the midst of the thick cloud of dust raised by the marching Crusaders. In their wake followed a long train of stragglers, scattered helter-skelter,—women, children, the wounded, the infirm, the sick, a mass of wretchedness dying of thirst, heat and fatigue. Here and there they drop down by the way in this boundless desert, never to rise again.

The least to be pitied among these stragglers are those who, having lost their horses, resolutely mounted an ass, an ox, a goat, occasionally one of those huge Syrian mastiffs, three feet in height. They thus drag along at the gait of the animal they ride, their swords on their side, their lances at their backs. In order to protect themselves from the consuming heat, that, descending at right angles on their skulls, often caused insanity or death, they carry strange head-pieces. Some shelter their heads under a piece of cloth spread out by means of sticks, that they hold in their hands in the manner of a dais; cleverer ones have plaited the dried leaves of the date plant into broad chaplets that shade their brows; the larger number wore a species of mask made of shreds of cloth, and perforated with a hole at the place of the eyes to protect their eye-lids from a dust so scorching and corrosive that it produced painful inflammations, and often led to death.

At a great distance from these Crusaders followed the foot-passengers in grotesque costumes, and sinking to their knees in the shifting sand, whose mere burning contact rendered intolerable the excoriation of their feet, worn to the quick by the road. Their limbs bandaged in dirty rags, the wounded tramped along painfully, leaning on their staffs. Women, gasping for breath, carried their children on their backs, or dragged them heaped upon rude sledges that they pulled after them with the aid of their husbands. Among these wretches, almost wholly in tatters, some were seen in bizarre accoutrement. There were men, who barely covered with a crazy frock-coat, yet sported on their heads

a rich turban of Oriental material; others, out at toes, wore a splendid cloak of embroidered silk, dashed with spots of blood, like all the other spoils of pillage and massacre.

Suffocated with stifling heat, blinded with the dust that the march raised, streaming with perspiration, parched with a devouring thirst, their skins burnt by the sun, ill of humor, gloomy and discouraged, these wretched beings were tramping along, muttering imprecations against the Crusade, when they perceived a numerous and brilliant cavalcade approaching through thick clouds of dust from a great distance in the rear. At the head of the cavalcade and mounted upon a spirited Arabian horse, black as ebony, advanced a young man in splendid accoutrements. It is William IX, the handsome Duke of Aquitaine, the impious poet, the contemner of the Church, the seducer of Malborgiane, whose portrait he carried in Gaul upon his shield. But Malborgiane is now forgotten and cast off, like so many other victims of this great debauchee. William IX is advancing at the head of his men-at-arms. His face at once bold and bantering, is partially covered by a wrapper of white silk that falls upon his shoulders. The outlines of his elegant and supple figure are set off by a light tunic of purple color; his broad hose, worn loose in Oriental style, exposes his boots of green leather, wrought in silver and tipped with gold. William carries neither arms or armor. With his left hand he guides his horse; on his right, covered with a gauntlet of embroidered leather, sits his favorite falcon, hooded in scarlet and its legs ornamented with little gold bells. Such is the courage of this bird that often does its master fly it against the vultures of the desert, as he more than once starts against the hyenas and jackals, the large hunting dogs with red collars that, breathing heavily, follow his horse. At the crupper of his prancing horse is a negro boy, eight or nine years of age, and quaintly arrayed. He carries a large parasol, whose shade shelters the head of William. At the right of the duke, and towering above him with its

large body, ambles a camel richly caparisoned. Another negro boy guides the animal seated in front of the double litter, which, closed in with silken curtains, is fastened with girths to the back and body of the animal, and is so contrived that in each of its compartments a person can be comfortably seated, protected from the sun and the dust. William often ensconced himself in one of them.

Beside William, rode the chevalier, Walter the Pennyless. Before his departure on the Crusade, the Gascon adventurer, pale, bony and tattered, bore a strong resemblance to the poor devil sketched on the upper part of his shield. Now, however, thanks to the sumptuousness of his dress, the knight recalls the second picture on his shield. From the pummel of his saddle hung a Venetian casque, which he had doffed for a turban, a more comfortable head-gear on the route. A long Dalmatic of light material, thrown over his rich armor, kept the latter from being heated in the burning rays of the sun. Of his poor equipment of yore, the Gascon preserved only his good sword, the Sweetheart of the Faith, and his little horse, the Sun of Glory. Surviving by the merest accident the perils and fatigues of the long passage, the Sun of Glory testified by the lustre of his coat to the good quality of the Saracen fodder, that he seemed to run short of as little as his master lacked provisions.

Behind these personages followed the equerries of the Duke of Aquitaine, carrying his standard, his sword, his lance and his shield, on which William was in the habit of carrying the pictures of his mistresses, the ephemerous objects of his libertine whims. Accordingly, the picture of Azenor the Pale, replacing that of Malborgiane, now occupied the center of the buckler; but, with a brazen refinement of corruption, other medallions, representing some of his numerous other concubines, surrounded the image of Azenor in token of homage.

The equerries led by the reins the duke's chargers, vigorous horses, covered and caparisoned in iron, carrying pendent from

their saddles the several pieces of their master's armor. He could thus don his war harness when came the hour of battle, instead of supporting its oppressive weight during the long route. After the equerries came, led by black slaves taken from the Saracens, the mules and camels that were laden with the baggage and provisions of the duke. If hunger, thirst and fatigue decimated the masses, the noble Crusaders, thanks to their wealth, almost always escaped privations. One of William's camels was loaded with several bags of citron and large pouches filled with wine and with water,—inestimable commodities in a journey over the deserts.

About three hundred men-at-arms constituted the cavalcade of the Duke of Aquitaine. These cavaliers, the only survivors of a thousand warriors who departed on the Crusade, now habituated to battle, innured to fatigue and bronzed by the sun of Syria, had long braved the dangers of the murderous climate. Their heavy iron armor weighed on their robust bodies no more than a coat of gauze. Disdain for danger, together with ferocity, was depicted on their savage countenances. Many among them bore from the pommels of their saddles, as bloody trophies, some Saracen head freshly severed, and suspended from the single lock of hair that Mohammedans keep at the top of their skulls. The cavaliers of the duke were armed with strong ash or aspen-tree lances ornamented with streaming bannerets, and double-edged long swords, besides a battle axe or a spiked mace hanging from their saddles. Oval bucklers, hauberks or steel coats-of-arms, braces, greaves, iron jambards,—of such was their armor. The troop was rapidly riding through the bands of stragglers, when a white slender hand parted the curtains of the litter beside which rode the duke, and a voice was heard calling:

"William, I am thirsty, let me have some water!"

"Azenor wishes to refresh herself!," said the noble Crusader reining in his horse and turning to Walter the Pennyless. "Fetch some water for my mistress. I know woman's impatience.

Besides, the lips must not be allowed to lanquish that ask for a fresh drink or a warm kiss!"

"Seigneur duke, I shall fetch the drink, do you take care of the kiss," retorted the adventurer turning his horse's head toward the baggage, while, stooping down on his horse, the duke pushed his head under the curtain.

"Oh, William, only the other day my lips were white and frozen. The fire of your kisses has returned to them their reddish hue."

"Which proves that I can perform as great prodigies as you, my beautiful witch."

"You quit giving me that name, William. It recalls the days I spent in the turret of Neroweg Worse than a Wolf, whom I execrate,—days of shame and trial to me, and whose memory haunts me."

"But you are well revenged for those days of shame. Count Neroweg is now poorer than the lowest of his serfs as a result of his losses at the gaming tables of Joppa where he met such consummate gamblers that they won from him five thousand gold besans, his silver plate, his baggage, his horses, his arms and even his sword. By Satan! I imagine I see that Neroweg, that Worse than a Wolf, that Count of Plouernel, so rudely plucked at the start of his Crusade, fighting with an old cap on for helmet, a stick for a lance, and for charger an ass, a goat or good Palestine mastiff!"

"Let's drop that sad topic, and talk about yourself, who have been the dream of my youth. Now that I am yours, I should feel happy, and yet my heart is cruelly tormented. Your inconstancy makes me despair. I am dying with jealousy. Can it be that that infamous Perrette the Ribald has her share of your caresses?"

"What a frisky and bold girl that Perrette is! After the seige of Antioch, cup in hand, her hair to the breeze——"

"Be still, William, I am jealous of her!"

"Poor Ribald! She must have died on the route. She never turned up again after that moment."

"I could have strangled her with my hands, and Yolande, also!"

"A ravishing girl! What a beautiful shape! A skin of satin! One imagines, seeing her, the Diana of old resurrected!"

"You are pitiless!" replied Azenor with a tremulous voice. "I hate those two women."

"Let others conquer Jerusalem! As to me, I'm satisfied with conquering German, Saxon, Bohemian, Hungarian, Walachian, Moldavian, Bulgarian, Greek, Byzantine, Saracen, Syrian, Moorish and negro beauties. Yes, by Venus! If I am anxious to enter Jerusalem, it is for the purpose of capturing the handsomest of the Arabian virgins."

"You bold and debauched fellow, it is not an only woman I have to fear for a rival! I am crazy for this man! Woe is me!"

"In order to appease your anger, I shall confide to you that there is a whole race your jealousy has nothing to apprehend from. Heavens and earth! the mere sight of a woman of that one breed would make me as chaste as a saint, and would turn your lover into another St. Anthony!"

"Of what race are you speaking?"

"Of the Jews!" answered the Duke of Aquitaine with a look of digust. "Oh, when I had all the Jews and Jewesses exterminated from my seigniories, not one woman of that accursed species escaped the torture, and death!"

"Whence do you gather such a rage against those wretched people? What harm have they done you? You have shown yourself cruel towards them," said Azenor the Pale with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Blood of Christ! See me take a Jewess for mistress! a Jewess!" replied the duke, trembling anew. An instant later, wishing no doubt to disengage himself from the thoughts that haunted him, William cried out joyfully: "To the devil with the Jews,

and long live Love! A sweet kiss, my charmer! A conversation on those infernal people leaves me an after-taste of sulphur and brimstone, as if I had tasted the kitchen of Satan! Let mine be the ambrosia of your kisses, of your passionate caresses, my loving one!"

A few distant cries and a tumult that broke out among the duke's men-at-arms interrupted his conversation with Azenor. He turned his head, and saw Walter the Pennyless riding towards him, holding a small vermillion cup in the hand that was free from his horse's bridle. "What noise is that?" asked the duke, taking the cup and passing it to Azenor.

"Seigneur duke, at the moment when your black slaves let down a pouch of water to fill this cup, into which I had first pressed the juice of two citrons and the sugar of one of the reeds found in this country and the marrow of which is as sweet as honey, the stragglers gathered around. 'Water! Water! I die of thirst!' cried some; 'My wife and children are dying for want!' cried others. By my sword, the Sweetheart of the Faith, never did frogs at a mid-summer drought croak more frightfully than those scamps. But some of your men-at-arms soon put an end to the frightful croaking, by laying about with their lances. The impudence of that rag-tag and bob-tail crowd is inconceivable! 'Where are those clear fountains that you promised us at our departure from Gaul?' they yelled in my ears; 'where are the refreshing shades?' "

"And what answer did you make, my merry Gascon, to those ignorant questioners?" asked the duke laughing, while Azenor, leaning out of the litter was imbibing and enjoying the contents of the little vermillion cup.

"I assumed the rude voice of my friend, Cuckoo Peter, and said to those brutes: 'Faith is a rich fountain that refreshes the soul. You have faith, ye soldiers of Christ. Dare you ask where are the shady gardens? Is not faith, besides a fountain, also an immense tree that spreads over the faithful its protecting

branches? Rest yourselves, spread yourselves in that shade. Never will an earthly oak tree have afforded you a more delectable shelter under its leafy branches. Finally, if these various refreshments should not yet suffice you, then broil in the heat like fish under the sand!"

"Well answered, my worthy Gascon!" And turning to his troop, the duke ordered in a loud voice: "On the march, and make haste, lest the army capture without us the city of Marhala, where a rich booty awaits us."

CHAPTER II.

SERF AND SEIGNEUR.

The cloud of dust raised by the troop of the Duke of Aquitaine was lost at a distance in a burning mist, whose reddish vapors were invading the horizon. Those among the stragglers who had resisted the fatigue, a consuming thirst, or painful wounds, followed haltingly, at great distances from one another, the road to Marhala, marked with so much human débris, above which flocks of vultures, for a moment frightened away, again leisurely flapped their wings. The last group of the stragglers had disappeared in the whirlwind of dust raised by the train, when three living creatures, a man, a woman and a child—Fergan, Joan the Hunchback and Colombaik—were left alone in the midst of the desert. Colombaik, dying with thirst, was stretched upon the sand beside his mother, whose sore feet, wrapped in blood-clotted rags, could no longer support her. On his knees beside them, his back turned to the sun, Fergan sought to shade his wife and child with his body. Not far from them, the corpses of a man and woman were in sight. An hour before the woman had succumbed to the agonies of childbirth, bringing forth a still child. The little being lay at the feet of its mother, almost shapeless, and already blackened and shriveled by the fiery sun. The man had been killed by the blow of a lance of one of the duke's men-at-arms for having tried to capture one of the water pouches.

Joan the Hunchback, seated beside Colombaik, whose head she held upon her knees, wept as she muttered: "Do you no longer hear me, dear heart? Do you not answer me?" The tears of the poor woman left their furrows on the dust-covered face of the child as they dropped, and ran down his cheeks to

the corners of his parched lips. His eyes half shut, and feeling his face bathed in his mother's tears, Colombaik carried his fingers mechanically towards his cheeks and his mouth, as if seeking to quench his thirst with the maternal tears. "Oh!" muttered Joan, observing the motions of her child, "Oh, if but my blood could recall you to life!" And, struck by the idea, she said to the quarryman: "Fergan, take your knife and open one of my veins; we may be able to save the child!"

"I was myself thinking of letting him drink blood," answered Fergan; "but I am robuster than you—" and the serf stopped short, interrupted by the sound of a great flapping of wings above his head. He felt the air agitated around him, raised his eyes and saw an enormous brown vulture, its neck and head stripped of feathers, letting itself heavily down upon the corpse of the still-born child, seize the little body between its talons, and, carrying off its prey, rise into space emitting a prolonged cry. Joan and her husband, for a moment forgetful of their own agonies, followed with frightened eyes the circulating flight of the vulture, when the serf descried, approaching from afar, a pilgrim mounted on an ass.

"Fergan," said Joan to the quarryman, whose eyes were fastened on the pilgrim, as he drew nearer and nearer, "Fergan, weakened as you are, if you lose blood for our child, you will perhaps die. I could not survive you. Who, then, would protect Colombaik? You can still walk and carry him on your shoulders. As to me, I am beyond proceeding. My bleeding feet refuse to carry me. Let me sacrifice myself for our child. You will then dig me a grave in the sand, that I be not eaten up by the vultures or the wild beasts."

Instead of answering his wife, Fergan said to her sharply: "Joan, spread yourself on the ground; do not budge; pretend to be dead, as I shall. We are saved!" Saying which the serf threw himself down flat on his stomach beside his wife. Already the heavy breathing of the pilgrim's donkey was heard approach-

ing. Though prodded, the beast moved slowly and with great effort, its legs sinking up to the knees in the sand. Its master, a man of tall and robust stature, was clad in a tattered brown robe, that fell to his feet, shod in sandals. In order to protect himself against the heat of the sun, he had drawn over his head like a cowl the tippet of his robe, which was sprinkled over with shells and bore the red cross of the Crusader on the left shoulder. From the donkey's pack-saddle hung a knap-sack, together with a large pouch of water.

While drawing near the corpses of the man and the woman whose new-born child had just been carried off by the vulture, the pilgrim, speaking to himself, said in a low voice: "Dead bodies everywhere! The road to Marhala is paved with corpses!" Saying this he arrived near the place where Joan and Fergan lay motionless on the sand. "And still more dead bodies!" muttered the pilgrim, turning his head aside, and he kicked his mule with both heels to hasten its pace. Hardly had he gone a few steps, when, rising and springing forward with one bound, Fergan jumped on the crupper of the donkey, seized the traveler by the shoulders, threw him back and on the ground, and, placing both his knees on the pilgrim's chest, held him down while hurriedly calling: "Joan, there is a full pouch at the donkey's saddle, take it quick, and give our child to drink!" The courageous mother was not able to walk, but dragging herself on her knees and hands as far as the donkey, which had stood still after its master was thrown down, she succeeded in unfastening the pouch, and, weeping with joy she returned to her child, again dragging herself on her knees with the help of one hand while holding the pouch with the other, muttering: "Provided it is not too late, my God, and that our child can be recalled to life!"

While Joan hastened to give her child to drink in the hope of plucking him from the claws of death, Fergan was engaged in a violent struggle with the traveler, whose traits he could not distinguish, the tippet of the latter's robe having wound itself

completely around his head. As robust as the quarryman, this man made violent efforts to extricate himself from the embrace of the serf. "I mean you no harm," Fergan was saying to him, continuing to struggle with his adversary. "My child is dying of thirst! you have in your pouch a precious beverage; I shall take it in the knowledge that you would have answered with a refusal, had I requested you for a few drops of the water that it contains."

"Oh, that I have not a single weapon to kill this dog who steals away my water!" groaned the pilgrim while redoubling his efforts to disengage himself. "In a minute I would have killed you; I would have cut you to pieces, vagabond!"

"I know this voice!" cried out Fergan, and brusquely pulling aside the folds of the tippet that covered the face of the traveler, the serf remained dumb with astonishment. Under him lay Neroweg, Worse than a Wolf!

The seigneur of Plouernel profiting by that moment of confusion, freed himself from Fergan's hold, rose, and thinking only of his pouch of water, cast his eyes about him. He saw a few steps away Joan, radiant with joy, yet tearful, on her knees near Colombaik, and holding the pouch which the child pressed with his two little hands, while he drank with avidity. He seemed to regain life in the measure that he slaked his consuming thirst.

"That bastard is drinking up my water!" Neroweg yelled with fury. "In this desert, water is life," and he was about to rush upon Joan and her child when the quarryman, recovering from his stupor, seized the Count of Plouernel between his robust arms: "We are not here in your seigniory; you covered with iron and I naked! Here we are man to man, body to body! In the midst of this desert we are equals, Neroweg! I shall have your life, or you shall have mine. Fight for it!"

A terrific struggle ensued, in the midst of the cries of Joan and Colombaik, who trembled for husband and for father. The seigneur of Plouernel was a man of redoubtable strength; but the serf, although weakened with privation and fatigue, drew

energy from his hatred of his implacable enemy. A Gallic serf, Fergan was struggling with a descendant of the Nerowegs! The combatants swayed forward and back, silent, desperate, breast to breast, face to face, livid, terrible, foaming with rage, palpitating with a homicidal ardor, furiously pressing each other, under a brassy sky, in the midst of thick clouds of dust raised by their own feet. On their knees, their hands joined in prayer, passing alternately from hope to fear, Joan and Colombaik dared not approach the two athletes, who ever and anon reappeared through the cloud of dust, frightful to behold. Suddenly the thud of a heavy fall was heard, simultaneously with the exhausted voice of Fergan: "Woe is me! Oh, my wife! Oh, my child!" Fergan lay prone upon the sand, vainly battling against Neroweg, who, having gained the upper hand, sought to strangle his adversary. He held him under his left knee while raising himself by his right leg that he stretched out with a violent effort. At the cries of despair, "My wife! My child!" emitted by the serf, Colombaik ran to his father, threw himself flat on the ground and clinging to the bare and stiff leg of Neroweg, the child bit him in the calf. The sharp and unexpected pain drew from the Count a scream, and he turned back sharply towards Colombaik. Fergan, thus freed from the grasp of his seigneur, lost no time to spring upon his feet, and now keeping the advantage, succeeded in throwing Neroweg down. Calling his son to his aid, the serf managed to pinion the arms of the Count with a long cord that held his own robe at the waist, and to bind his legs with the fastenings of his own sandals. Feeling his strength exhausted by this desperate combat, Fergan, ready to faint, covered with perspiration, threw himself on the sand beside Joan and his son. These hastened to approach to his lips the pouch in which there still was some water left, while the seigneur of Plouernel, breathing fast and broken, shot at the quarryman looks of impotent rage.

"We are saved!" said Fergan when he had slaked his thirst and felt his strength returning. "By husbanding the water still

left in this pouch, we shall have enough to reach Marhala with. I have a provision of dates in my knap-sack. The ass will serve you and the child to ride on, my poor Joan. I can still walk. As to the seigneur of Plouernel," Fergan proceeded with a somber look, "he will soon need neither provision nor conveyance!" And rising to his feet, while his wife and child followed his movements with uneasy eyes, the serf approached Neroweg. The seigneur, still stretched upon the sand, writhed in his bands, tugging to burst them; then, exhausted by his idle efforts, he lay motionless. "Do you recognize me?" asked the serf, crossing his arms on his breast, and looking down upon the fettered seigneur of Plouernel; "Do you recognize me? In Gaul you were my seigneur, I your serf. I am the grandson of Den-Brao the Mason, whom your grandfather, Neroweg IV, killed of hunger in the subterranean donjon of Plouernel. I am a relative of Bezenecq the Rich, who died under the torture, in the presence of his own daughter, herself going crazy with fear, and dying at the very moment when I was rescuing her from her cell. I had to dig her grave among the rocks that lie about the issue of the secret passage from your castle."

"By the tomb of the Saviour! Is it you, vagabond, who penetrated to the turret of Azenor the Pale? You helped her in her flight?"

"I went to look in your den for my child, whom you see yonder."

"Woe is me! I am alone in this desert, without arms, bound hand and foot, at the mercy of this vile serf. How comes this dog to have survived this long journey? A curse upon him!"

"I have survived in order to avenge upon you the wrongs you have perpetrated upon my kin. This is not the first time that a descendant of Joel the Gaul locks horns with a descendant of Neroweg the Frank. Before us, in the course of centuries, that rolled by, the ancestors of us two have met arms in hand. Fate so wills it. It is a war to death between our two races. The struggle, mayhap, will continue yet ages to come. Neroweg, I

am the evil genius of your race, as you and yours are the persecutors of mine."

"That I should have to meet this miserable runaway serf, and find myself in his power in the midst of a Syrian desert!" muttered the seigneur of Plouernel, a prey to superstitious terror. "Jesus, my God, have mercy upon me! I am a great sinner! Mighty Saint Martin, come to my help!"

"Neroweg," proceeded Fergan, after a moment's reflection, "the heat grows suffocating, despite the sun's being veiled behind that reddish mist that is slowly rising heavenward. My wife and I shall not proceed on our journey until the moon rises. You and I shall have time to talk matters over, before taking leave of each other forever."

The seigneur of Plouernel contemplated the serf with a mixture of astonishment, defiance and terror. Fergan, exchanged a look with Joan, and sat down on the sand at a little distance from Neroweg. Indeed, the atmosphere was becoming so stifling that the travelers, panting for breath, and streaming in perspiration, yet, without making any motion, would have been unable to resume their journey.

"In Gaul, at your seigniory, you were at once indicter, judge and executioner over your serfs. To-day, my seigniory is this desert! and you my serf! In my turn I shall be the indicter, the judge and the executioner. The indictment I shall draw up will be the recital of my journey. You may then, perhaps, understand the horror that you, seigneurs, inspire your serfs with, when you will have learned the dangers that we brave to escape your tyranny and enjoy a day of freedom. When we left your seigniory, we were three thousand Crusaders, men, women, or children. Our numbers increased daily. Thus, after we had traversed Gaul from west to east, from Anjou to Lorraine, we were more than sixty thousand when we crossed over into Germany. Other troops of Crusaders, no less numerous than ours, and also proceeding from Gaul, to the north from Flanders, to the south from Burgundy or Provence, struck like ourselves the

route for the Orient. After traversing Hungary and Bohemia, skirting the Adriatic to Wallachia, and following the banks of the Danube, we arrived at Constantinople. Thence we entered Asia Minor, and from Asia Minor we made into Palestine, where we now are. What a journey! For poor serfs, barefooted and in rags, the road is long. To tramp fifteen hundred leagues in order to escape the oppression of the seigneurs! But unhappy serfs that we are! We flee the seigneurs, and the seigneurs pursue us into Palestine. The seigneur Baudoin seizes Edessa, and there you have a 'Count of Edessa'; Godfrey, Duke of Bouillion, takes Tripoli, and there you have a 'Prince of Tripoli.' When we shall have arrived in Galilee, in Nazareth, in Jerusalem, we may live to see a 'King of Jerusalem,' a 'Baron of Galilee,' a 'Marquis of Nazareth!'—a full seigniorial hierarchy."

"This miserable serf has gone crazy," muttered the seigneur of Plouernel to himself. "He may, perhaps, forget to kill me."

"Our troop left Gaul, as I said, sixty thousand strong, under the lead of Cuckoo Peter and Walter the Pennyless. On the road the inoffensive inhabitants were pillaged, ravaged and massacred to the cry of 'God wills it!' Deceived on the length of the journey and in their ignorance, hardly had the Crusaders left Gaul, when, at the sight of each new town they asked: 'Is that Jerusalem?' 'Not yet,' answered Cuckoo Peter, 'we must march on!' And we marched. At the start it was a joy, a delirium, a triumphal procession! Serfs and villeins were the masters. People fled and trembled at our approach. The 'soldiers of Christ' sacked or burned the towns, set fire to the harvests, killed the cattle that they could not drag along, slaughtered old men and children, raped the women and then cut them to pieces, heaped up booty, and from city to city repeated the question: 'Is not that Jerusalem, either?' 'Not yet!' answered Cuckoo Peter and Walter the Pennyless. 'Not yet! March on, march on!' And we marched. The strangers, at first taken by surprise, allowed themselves to be pillaged and massacred by the 'soldiers of the faith.' But, soon apprised by report of the ravages committed

by the Crusaders and of their ferocity, these were fought with determination, and so effectively were they cut down, that our troop, consisting of more than sixty thousand people at the start, numbered at its arrival in Constantinople only five or six thousand survivors. During the journey through Asia Minor and Palestine, that number was reduced by one-half through battles, the pest, hunger, thirst and fatigue. Among the survivors, some, seized and kept for serfs of the new seigniories of Edessa, Antioch or Tripoli, have been forced to cultivate these lands for the seigneurs under the killing sun of the Holy Land. Others, and I am of the number, preferring freedom to renewed servitude, risked their lives in order to continue their march to Jerusalem. Some expect to find considerable booty in the Holy City; others imagine they will gain Paradise by rescuing the tomb of Christ. Of them all, I alone wish to reach Jerusalem, in order to see the places where, now a thousand and odd years ago, my ancestress, Genevieve, witnessed the death of the young man of Nazareth. This is how was accomplished the pilgrimage of those thousands of serfs and villeins, whose bones mark a long trail from the frontiers of Gaul to this place. Fatality drove them. They were forced to move on, or perish on the road. Thus, myself, fleeing from your seigniory to escape your gaolers, would but have been exposed to renewed servitude had I stopped in Gaul. Beyond the frontiers, to separate myself from the Crusaders, and take my chances with my wife and child among nations in arms against the 'soldiers of the cross,' would have been insanity. There was no choice but to march, and march again. Moreover, miserable as it was, yet our vagrant life was no worse than the life of serfdom. That's how it happened, Neroweg, that we meet here in the desert where you are mine, just as in your seigniory I was yours,—at my will and mercy, in life and death. Do you understand?"

The seigneur of Plouernel muttered in a hollow voice, expressive of concentrated rage: "Oh, to perish by the hand of a vile serf!"

"Yes, you shall die. But I mean to make your dying hour a long-drawn torture. The vain-glory, the cupidity, the ambition of founding seigniories in the Orient, the hope of buying back your forfeitures and of escaping from the claws of the devil have driven you seigneurs to the Crusade! Oh, how stupid you were! How many of you, haughty seigneurs, after having sold or mortgaged your lands to the Church, are not this hour ruined by gaming and debauchery, and reduced to beg your way! How many have not been massacred or abandoned by your serfs a few miles from your seigniories! How many of you have not died of the pest or under the scimiter of the Saracen! Let this thought embitter your dying hour, Neroweg, you are about to die like a beggar midst the sands of Syria, while the Bishop of Nantes, your mortal enemy, having slipped through your fingers, now enjoys the largest part of your domains! At this hour you groan with a rage that is impotent, and my vengeance begins."

"A curse upon that Italian priest whom I captured with the Bishop of Nantes! That Jeronimo turned my head speaking to me of the Crusade. He made me fear for my salvation, pointing out that the hand of God weighed heavy upon me by the death of one of my sons, killed by his own brother!"

"Both your sons are dead ,Neroweg! I myself felled the fratricide with a blow of my iron bar at the moment he was about to do violence to the daughter of Bezenecq the Rich! Both the wolves and the whelps of the seigniories are beasts of prey and of carnage. They must be exterminated!"

"My son Gonthram did not die, and Jeronimo promised me, in the name of God, that if I departed for the Crusade and let the Bishop of Nantes free, I would insure the recovery of my son. Oh, heart-broken at the sight of one son dead and the other dying, I was bereft of reasoning! I obeyed the priest and departed for Palestine,—to my greater undoing. Bitterly I repent the day!"

Fergan, struck at the tenderness that the seigneur of Plouernel

had not been able to suppress at the mention of his son Gonthram, said to him: "You love your son?"

Neroweg shot with his eyes daggers of hatred at the serf as he lay stretched out on the sand at the latter's feet. Two tears rolled down his savage face. But wishing to conceal his emotions from Fergan, he turned his head brusquely aside. Joan and Colombaik, having drawn near the quarryman, listened in silence to his dialogue with Neroweg. While the seigneur sought to hide his tears, the woman saw them and said in a whisper to her husband: "Despite his wickedness, that seigneur weeps at the thought of his son. His sorrow affects me."

"Oh, father," put in Colombaik, joining his hands, "if he weeps, be you merciful! Do not harm him!"

The serf remained silent a moment, then, addressing his seigneur said: "You are moved at the thought of your child, and yet you meant to have mine strangled. Do you imagine a serf has not, like you, a father's heart?"

Neroweg answered with an outburst of sarcastic laughter.

"What are you laughing about?"

"I laughed as I would if I heard an ass, or other beast of burden, talk about his 'father's heart,'" rejoined the seigneur of Plouernel. "You vagabond, were I not in your power now, I would kill you for the vile dog that you are!"

"In his eyes a serf has no more soul than a beast of burden!" repeated the quarryman. "Yes, this man speaks in the sincerity of his savage pride. He weeps for his own child. After all he is human. And yet, what is a serf to him? An animal without heart, reason or feeling! But why should I wonder? Neroweg cannot choose but share with his likes that opinion of our animal abjectness. Our craven attitude confirms it. Our conquerors are thousands, while we, the conquered, number millions, and yet we patiently bear the yoke. Indeed, never did more docile cattle march under the whip of a master, or stretch the neck to the butcher's knife!" After a moment's silence, Fergan resumed: "Listen, Neroweg! You are in my power, disarmed

and fettered. I am about to fulfil a great act of justice by braining you with my cudgel like a wolf caught in a trap. It is the death that you deserve. Had I a sword, I would not use it on you. But what you have just said has made me think and somewhat spoils my pleasure. I admit it; by reason of our brutishness and cowardice, we deserve to be looked upon and treated like cattle by you, our seigneurs. 'Tis true, we are as craven as you are ferocious, but if our cravenness explains your criminal conduct, it does not excuse it. So, you shall die, Neroweg! Yes, in the name of the horrid ills that your race has made mine suffer, you shall die! I only wish to keep a memento of you, a descendant of the Nerowegs," and Fergan leaned forward over the seigneur of Plouernel. The latter, believing his last hour had come, could not restrain a cry of anguish. But the serf only pulled from Neroweg's robe one of the shells that it was sprinkled with, as symbols of a pious pilgrimage. For an instant Fergan contemplated the shell with a pensive mien. Joan and her son, following with astonished and uneasy looks the movements of the quarryman, saw him raise his ragged kilt, that only half-covered his thighs, and detach a long belt of coarse cloth that was wound around his waist. Inside the belt the quarryman carried several pious mementos, that had been handed down from generation to generation in his family, and which, before finally marching away with the troop of the Crusaders, he had taken with him. To them he added the shell he had just pulled from the robe of Neroweg VI. Refastening his belt, the serf cried out: "And now, justice and vengeance, Neroweg! I have accused you, judged and condemned you. You shall now die!" Looking around for his heavy and knotted staff, he grasped the massive implement with both his powerful hands, while his wife and child implored aloud: "Mercy!" The serf, however, throwing himself upon the seigneur of Plouernel planted one foot on the latter's breast: "No, no mercy! Did the Nerowegs know mercy for my grandfather, for Bezenecq the Rich, or for his daughter?" Saying which, the quarryman raised the cudgel over the head

of Neroweg, Worse than a Wolf, who, gnashing his teeth, faced death without blanching. It would have been over then and there with the seigneur of Plouernel had not Joan embraced the knees of her husband, imploring him aloud: "For the love of your son, have mercy! Without the water that you took from this seigneur, Colombaik would have expired in the desert!"

Fergan yielded to the prayers of his wife. Despite the justice of the reprisal, it went against his nature to kill an unarmed enemy. He threw his staff far away; remained for an instant gloomy and silent and then said to his seigneur: "It is said that despite your crimes, you and your likes at times remain true to your vows. Swear to me, by the salvation of your soul and by your faith as a knight, to respect from this moment the life of my wife, of my child and of myself. I do not fear you so long as we are alone in this desert, but if I meet you at Marhala or Jerusalem with the other seigneurs of the Crusade, I and mine will be at your mercy. You could order us burned or hanged. Swear that you will respect our lives, I shall then have mercy upon you, and set you free."

"An oath to you, vile serf! To soil my word by passing it to you!" cried out Neroweg, and he added with another outburst of sardonic laughter: "As well might I give my word as a Catholic and a knight to the ass or any other beast of burden!"

"This is too much!" yelled Fergan exasperated, while he ran to pick up his club. "By the bones of my father, you shall die!"

At the very moment, however, when the serf had anew seized the cudgel, Joan, clinging to his arm said with terror: "Do you hear yonder growing noise? . . . It approaches. . . . It rumbles like thunder!"

"Father," cried out Colombaik, no less horrified than his mother, "look yonder! The sky is red as blood!"

The serf raised his eyes, and, struck with the strange and startling spectacle, forgot all about Neroweg. The orb of the sun, already near the horizon, seemed enormous and of purple hue. Its rays disappeared at intervals in the midst of a burning

mist which it lighted with a dull fire, and whose reflection suddenly crimsoned the desert and the air. The frightful spectacle seemed to be seen through some transparent glass tinted with a coppery red. A furious gale, still distant, swept over the desert and carried with its dull and prolonged moanings a breath as scorching as the exhalations of a furnace. Flocks of vultures fled at full tilt before the approaching hurricane, scurrying over the ground or dropping down motionless, palpitating, or uttering plaintive squeaks. Suddenly the sun, ever more completely eclipsed, disappeared behind an immense cloud of reddish sand that veiled the desert and the sky, and that advanced with the swiftness of lightning, chasing before it the jackals and the lions, that roared with fear, and rushed by, terror-stricken, a few steps from Fergan and his family.

"We are lost! This is a sand-spout!" cried out the quarryman.

Hardly had the serf uttered these words of despair when he found himself enveloped by a sand cloud as fine as ashes, and dense as a fog. The mobile soil, hollowed, thrown up and upturned by the irresistible force of the sand-spout, opened at the feet of Fergan, who, with wife and child, disappeared under a sand wave. The gale furrowed, beat about and tossed up the sands of the desert as a tempest furrows, beats about, and tosses up the waters of the ocean.

CHAPTER III.

THE EMIR'S PALACE.

The city of Marhala, like all others in the Orient, was crossed by narrow and sinuous streets, bordered with whitewashed houses, bearing narrow windows. Here and there the dome of a mosque or the top of a palm tree, planted in the middle of an interior court-yard, broke the uniformity of the straight lines formed by the terraces, that surmounted all the houses. Since about fifteen days, and after a murderous siege, the city of Marhala had fallen into the power of the army of the Crusaders, commanded by Bohemond, Prince of Taranto. The ramparts of the city, half torn down by the engines of war, presented at several places only a heap of ruins, from which a pestilential odor escaped, due to the decomposition of the Saracen bodies that were buried under the débris of the walls. The gate of Agra was one of the points most violently attacked by a column of Crusaders under the order of William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, and also most stubbornly defended by the garrison. Not far from the spot rose the palace of the Emir of Marhala, killed at the siege. According to the manner of the Crusaders, William had his standard raised over the door of the palace, of which he took possession.

Night was falling. Maria, a large wrinkled old woman, with a beaked nose, protruding chin, and clad in a long Saracen pelisse, sat crouched upon a kind of divan, furnished with cushions, in one of the lower halls of the Emir's palace. She had just issued the order to some invisible person: "Let the creature come in, I wish to examine her!"

The creature that came in was Perrette the Ribald, the mistress of Corentin the Gibbet-cheater. The young woman's complexion, now tanned by the sun, rendered still more striking the

whiteness of her teeth, the coral tint of her lips and the fire of her eyes. The expression of her pretty face preserved its blithe effrontery. Her tattered costume was of both sexes. A turban of an old yellow-and-red material partially covered her thick and curly hair; a waistcoat or caftan of pale green and open embroidery, the spoils of a Saracen and twice too large for her, served her for a robe. Held at the waist by a strip of cloth, the robe exposed the naked legs of the Ribald, together with her dusty feet, shod in shoddy sandals. She carried at the end of a cane a small bundle of clothes. Upon entering the hall, Perrette said to the old woman deliberately: "I happened on the market place when an auction sale of booty was being conducted. An old woman, after eying me a long time, said to me: 'You seem to be the right kind of a girl. Would you like to exchange your rags for pretty clothes, and lead a merry life at the palace? Come with me.' I answered the old woman: 'March, I follow! Feastings and palaces are quite to my taste.'"

"You look to me to be a wide-awake customer."

"I'm eighteen years old. My name is Perrette the Ribald. That's what I am."

"Your name is written on your brazen brow. But are you good company? Not quarrelsome and not jealous?"

"The more I look upon you, honest matron, the surer I am of having seen you before. Did you not keep at Antioch the famous tavern of the Cross of Salvation?"

"You do not deceive yourself, my child."

"Ah, you must have made many a bag of gold besans in your holy brothel."

"What were you doing in Antioch, my pretty child?"

"I was in love . . . with the King!"

"You are bantering, my friend, there was no king in the Crusade."

"You forget the King of the Vagabonds."

"What! The chief of those bandits, of those skinners, of those eaters of human flesh?"

"Before he became the king of the bandits, I loved him under the modest name of Corentin the Gibbet-cheater. Oh, what has become of him?"

"You must have left him?"

"One day I made a slip. I committed an infidelity towards him. I do not plume myself upon my constancy. I left the King of the Vagabonds for a duke."

"A duke of beggars?"

"No, no! A real duke. The handsomest of all the Crusaders, William IX."

"You were the mistress of the Duke of Aquitaine?"

"That was in Antioch, after the siege. William IX was crossing the market-place on horseback. He smiled, and reached his hand out to me. I placed my foot on the tip of his boot, with one jump I landed in front of his saddle, and he took me to his palace," and seeming to recall some droll incident, Perrette laughed out aloud.

"Are you laughing at some of your tricks?" asked the old shrew.

"On that same day when the Duke of Aquitaine took me on his horse, a very beautiful woman went by in a litter. At the sight of her he turned his horse and followed the litter. I, fearing he would drop me for the other woman, said to him: 'What a treasure of beauty is that Rebecca the Jewess, that has just gone by in a litter.' Ha! ha! ha! old lady," Perrette added, breaking out anew into roars of laughter. "Thanks to that lucky slander, my debauché turned about and galloped off to his own palace, fleeing from the litter no less frightened than if he had seen the devil. And so it happened that, at least for that one day, I kept my duke, and we spent the night together."

"I see. And what became of your king?"

"On the same evening of that adventure, he left Antioch with his vagabonds on an expedition. I have not seen him since."

"Well, my little one, in default of your king, you will find your duke back. You are here in the house of William."

"Of the Duke of Aquitaine?"

"After the siege of the city, William took possession of the Emir's palace. He gives to-night a feast to several seigneurs, the flower of the Crusade. Almost all old customers of my tavern in Antioch: Robert Courte-Heuse, Duke of Normandy; Heracle, seigneur of Polignac; Bohemond, Prince of Taranto; Gerhard, Count of Roussillon; Burchard, seigneur of Montmorency; William, sire of Sabran; Radulf, seigneur of Haut-Poul, and many more merry blades, without counting the gentlemen of the cloth, and the tonsured lovers of pretty girls, of Cyprus wine and of dice."

"Is it for this one feast, you old mackerel, that you are engaging me?"

"You will remain in the palace until the departure of the army for Jerusalem, my gentle pupil and pearl of gay girls."

The entrance of a third woman interrupted the conversation between Maria and Perrette, who, uttering a short cry, ran to a miserably dressed young girl, just let in. "You here, Yolande?"

Yolande preserved her beauty, but her face had lost the charm of candor, that rendered her so touching when she and her mother implored Neroweg VI not to deprive them of their patrimony. The face of Yolande, alternately bold and gloomy, according as she brazened out or blushed at her degradation, at least gave token that she was conscious of her infamy. At sight of Perrette, who ran towards her with friendly eagerness, Yolande stepped back ashamed of meeting with the queen of the wenches. Perrette, reading on the countenance of the noble girl a mixture of embarrassment and disdain, said to her reproachfully: "You were not quite so proud when, ten leagues from Antioch, I kept you from dying of thirst and hunger! Oh, you put on airs! You have become haughty!"

"Why did I leave Gaul?" muttered Yolande with sorrowful contrition. "Though reduced to misery, at least I would not have known ignominy. I would not have become a courtezan!

A curse upon you, Neroweg! By depriving me of the inheritance of my father, you caused my misfortune and shame!"

The girl, unable to repress her tears, hid her face in her hands, while Maria, who had attentively examined her, said to Perrette in an undertone: "Oh, the pretty legs of that girl! Do you know Yolande?"

"We left Gaul together, I on the arm of the Gibbet-cheater, Yolande at the crupper of her lover, Eucher. In Bohemia, Eucher was killed by the Bohemians who resisted us. Yolande, now a widow and alone, could not continue so long a journey without protection. From one protector to another, Yolande fell under the eyes of the handsome Duke of Aquitaine at Bairut in Syria. Later I found her riding on the road to Tripoli dying of hunger, thirst and fatigue——"

"And you came to my aid, Perrette," fell in Yolande, who, having dried her tears, overheard the words of the queen of the wenches. "You gave me bread and water to appease my hunger and thirst, and you saved my life."

"Come, my children, let's not have tears," remarked the matron. "Tears make old faces. You shall be taken to the baths of the Emir, where are assembled some of the most beautiful Saracen female slaves of that infidel dog."

At that moment an old woman, the same who had introduced Perrette and Yolande to the hall, came in roaring with laughter, and said to the other shrew: "Oh, Maria, what a find! A diamond in your brothel!"

"What makes you laugh that way?"

"A minute ago, coming back from casting my hook on the market-place,"—and she broke out laughing anew. Presently she proceeded: "And I found there—I found there—a diamond!"

"Finish your story!"

But the second old hag, instead of answering, disappeared for an instant behind the curtain that masked the door, and immediately re-appeared conducting Joan the Hunchback, who led by

the hand the little Colombaik, no less exhausted than herself from privations and fatigue. To all cruel hearts the poor woman, indeed, was a laughable sight. Her long, tangled hair, half tumbling over her face, fell upon her bare shoulders, dusty like her breast, arms and legs. Her clothing consisted of shreds, fastened around her waist with a band of plaited reeds, so that her sad deformity was exposed in all its nudity. Joan had stripped herself of the rags that constituted the bodice of her robe in order to wrap the feet of Colombaik, flayed to the quick by his long tramp across the burning sands. The quarryman's wife, sad and broken down, quietly followed the shrew, and daring not to raise her eyes, while the latter did not cease laughing.

"What sort of thing is that you bring me there?" cried out the coupler. "What do you want to do with that monster?"

"A first-class joke," replied the other, finally overcoming her hilarity. "We shall rig out this villein in some grotesque costume, leaving her hump well exposed, and we shall present this star of beauty to the noble seigneurs. They will split their sides with laughter. Imagine this darling in the midst of a bevy of pretty girls. Would you not call that a diamond?"

"Ha, ha, ha! An excellent idea!" the matron rejoined, now laughing no less noisily than her assistant. "We shall place upon her head a turban of peacock feathers; we shall ornament her hump with all sorts of gew-gaws. Ha, ha! How those dear seigneurs will be amused. It will pay us well!"

"That's not all, Maria. My find is doubly good. Look at this marmot. It is a little cupid. Everyone to his taste!"

"He is certainly sweet, despite his leanness, and the dust that his features are stained with. His little face is attractive."

Seized with compassion at the sight of Joan and her child, Yolande had not shared in the cruel mirth of the two shrews. But Perrette, less tender, had broken out into a loud roar, when, suddenly struck by a sudden recollection, and attentively eyeing Joan, against whom Colombaik, no less confused and uneasy than his mother, was cuddling closely, the queen of the wenches

cried out: "By all the Saints of Paradise! Did you not inhabit in Gaul one of the villages of a neighboring seigniory of Anjou?"

"Yes," answered the poor woman in a weak voice, "we started from there on the Crusade."

"Do you remember a young girl and a tall scamp who wanted to carry you along to Palestine?"

"I remember," answered Joan, regarding Perrette with astonishment; "but I managed to escape those wicked people."

"Rather say those 'good people,' because the young woman was myself, and the tall scamp my lover, Corentin. We wanted to take you to the Holy Land, assuring you that you would be exhibited for money! Now, then, by the faith of the queen of the wenches! confess, Yolande, that I am a mighty prophetess!" added Perrette, turning to her companion. But the latter reproachfully answered her: "How have you the courage to mock a mother in the presence of her child!"

These words seemed to make an impression upon Perrette. She checked her laughter, relapsed into a brooding silence, and seemed touched by the fate of Joan, while Yolande addressed the woman kindly: "Poor, dear woman, how did you allow yourself to be brought here with your child? You cannot know what place this is. You are in a house of prostitution."

"I arrived in this city with a troop of pilgrims and Crusaders, who, by a miracle, escaped, like myself and son, a sand-spout that buried, a fortnight ago, so many travelers under the sands of the desert. I had sat down with my son under the shadow of a wall, exhausted with fatigue and hunger, when yonder woman," and Joan pointed to the shrew, "after long looking at me, said to me charitably: 'You seem to be very much tired out, you and your child. Will you follow me? I shall take you to a holy woman of great piety.' It was an unlooked-for piece of good luck to me," added Joan. "I put faith in the words of this woman, and I followed her hither."

"Alack! You have fallen into a hateful trap. They propose

to make sport of you," Yolande replied in a low voice. "Did you not hear those two shrews?"

"I care little. I shall submit to all humiliation, all scorn, provided food and clothing be given to my child," rejoined Joan in accents that betokened both courage and resignation. "I will suffer anything upon condition that my poor child may rest for a while, recover himself and regain his health. Oh, he is now doubly dear to me——"

"Did you lose his father?"

"He remained, undoubtedly, buried in the sand," answered Joan, and like Colombaik, she could not restrain her tears at the memory of Fergan. "When the sand-spout broke over us, I felt myself blinded and suffocated. My first movement was to take my child in my arms. The ground opened under my feet and I lost consciousness. I remember nothing after that."

"But how did you reach this city, poor woman?" asked the queen of the wenches, interested by so much sweetness and resignation. "The road is long across the desert, and you seem too feeble to sustain the fatigues of such a journey."

"When I regained consciousness," answered Joan, "I was lying in a wagon, near an old man who sold provisions to the Crusaders. He took pity upon me and my child, having found us in a dying condition, half buried under the sand. Surely my husband perished. The old man told me he saw other victims near us when he picked us up. Unfortunately the mule to which the wagon of the charitable man was hitched died of fatigue ten leagues from Marhala. Compelled to remain on the road and to abandon the troop of pilgrims, our protector was killed trying to protect his provisions against the stragglers. They pillaged everything, but they did not harm us. We followed them, fearing to lose our way. I carried my child on my back when he found himself unable to walk. It was thus that we arrived in this city. It is a sad story!"

"But your husband may yet, like you, have escaped death. Do not despair," observed Yolande.

"If he escaped that danger, it was probably to fall into a greater, for the seigneur of Plouernel——"

"The seigneur of Plouernel!" exclaimed Yolande interrupting Joan, "do you know that scoundrel?"

"We were serfs in his seigniory. It is from the country of Plouernel that we departed for the Holy Land. Accident made us meet with the seigneur count shortly before the sand-spout burst upon us. My husband and he fought——"

"And did he not kill Neroweg?"

"No, he yielded to my prayers."

"What, pity for Neroweg, Worse than a Wolf!" exclaimed Yolande in an explosion of rage and hatred. "Oh, I am but a woman! But I would have stabbed him to the heart without remorse! The monster!"

"What did he do to you?"

"He deprived me of the inheritance of my father, and, falling from shame to shame, I have become the companion of the queen of the wenches."

"Oh, mademoiselle Yolande," remarked Perrette, returning to her cynic quips, "will you ever remain proud?"

"I?" answered the young woman with a sad and bitter smile. "No, no! Pride is not allowed me. You are the queen. I am one of your humble subjects."

"Come, come, my daughters!" said the matron. "The day declines. Go to the baths of the Emir. As to you, my beauty," proceeded the devilish shrew, addressing Joan, "as to you, we shall rig you up, we shall perfume you, and above all we shall have your hump radiate with matchless lustre."

"You may do with me what you please, when you will have given my child wherewithal to appease his hunger and thirst. He must recover his strength, he must sleep. I shall not leave him one instant."

"Be easy, my star of beauty, you shall remain at his side, nor shall your child want for anything. We shall pay due attention to him."

CHAPTER IV.

ORGIES OF THE CRUSADERS.

The interior court-yard of the palace of the Emir, of Marhala, presented that evening a fairy aspect. The court was a perfect square. Along the four sides ran a wide gallery of Moorish ogives carved with trifoil and supported by low pillars of rose-colored marble. Between each column and into the court, large vases of Oriental alabaster filled with flowers served as pedestals to gilded candelabras holding torches of perfumed wax. Mosaics of various colors ornamented the floor of the galleries. The ceilings and walls disappeared under white arabesques chiseled on a purple background. Soft silken divans reclined against the walls, pierced with several ogive doors that were half closed with curtains fringed with pearls. These doors led to the interior apartments. At each corner of the galleries, gilded cages with silver bars held the rarest birds of Arabia, on whose plumage were mirrored the glint of the ruby, the emerald and the azure sapphire. In the center of the court a jet of crystalline water shot up from a large porphyry vase, falling back in a brilliant spray, and producing the murmur of a perpetual cascade as the water overflowed into a broad basin, from whose marble rim rose another circle of large and gilded candelabras, similar to those along the galleries. This refreshing fountain, sparkling with light, served as central ornament to a low table that wound around the basin and was covered with a cloth of embroidered silk. On it glistened the magnificent gold and silver vessels, carried from Gaul by the Duke of Aquitaine, and the rich spoils taken from the Saracens: goblets and decanters studded with precious stones, large amphoras filled with wine of Cyprus and Greece, huge gold platters on which were

displayed Phœnician peacocks, Asiatic pheasants, quarters of Syrian antelopes and mutton, Byzantine hams, heads of the wild boars of Zion, and pyramids of fruit and confectionery. The banquet hall had for its dome the starry vault. The night was calm and serene; not a breath of wind agitated the flames of the torches.

But the tumult of an orgie resounded at this sumptuous table, around which, seated or reclining upon couches, feasted the guests of William IX. Distinguished above all and occupying the place of honor, was the legate of the Pope; then followed, to the right and left of the Duke of Aquitaine, Bohemond, Prince of Taranto; Tancred; Robert Courte-Heuse, Duke of Normandy; Heracle, seigneur of Polignac; Siegfried, seigneur of Sabran; Gerhard, Duke of Roussillon; Radulf, seigneur of Haut-Poul; Arnulf, sire of Beaugency; and other seigneurs of Frankish origin, beside the knight, Walter the Pennyless. These noblemen, already effeminated by Oriental habits, instead of remaining armed from dawn to dusk, as in Gaul, had exchanged their harness of war for long robes of silk. The Duke of Aquitaine, whose hair floated on a tunique of gold cloth, wore, after the fashion of the ancients, a chaplet of roses and violets, already wilted by the vapors of the feast. Azenor the Pale, whose lips, no longer white as of yore, but now red with life, was seated beside William, superbly ornamented with sparkling collars and bracelets of precious stones. The papal legate, clad in a robe of purple silk bordered with ermine, carried on his breast a cross of carbuncles hanging from a gold chain. Behind him, ready to wait upon his master, stood a young negro slave, in a short blouse of white silk with silver collar and bracelets ornamented with corals. The cup-bearers and equerries of the other seigneurs likewise attended the table. The wines of Cyprus and of Samos had been flowing from vermillion amphoras since the beginning of the feast, and flowed still, carrying away in their perfumed waves the senses of the guests. The Duke of Aquitaine, one arm encircling the waist of Azenor, and raising heavenward the

gold goblet at which his mistress had just moistened her lips, called out: "I drink to you, my guests! May Bacchus and Venus be propitious to you! Honor to him who is deepest in love!"

Heracle, the seigneur of Polignac, in turn raised his cup and answered: "William, Duke of Aquitaine, we, your guests, drink to your courtesy and your splendid banquet!"

"Yes, yes!" joined the Crusaders; "let's drink to the banquet of William IX! Let's drink to the courtesy of the Duke of Aquitaine!"

"I drink gladly," said Arnulf, the seigneur of Beaugency, in his cups, and, shaking his head, he added meditatively, a sentence already repeated by him a score of times during the repast with the tenacity of the maudlin: "I'd like to know what my wife, the noble lady Capeluche, is doing at this hour in her chamber!"

"By my faith, seigneurs," said the seigneur of Haut-Poul, "as true as ten deniers were paid for an ass's head during the scarcity at the siege of Antioch, I have not in my life feasted like to-night. Glory to the Duke of Aquitaine!"

"Let's talk of the scarcity," rejoined Bohemond, the Prince of Taranto; "its recollection may serve to rekindle our satisfied hunger and our extinguished thirst."

"I ate up my shoes soaked in water and seasoned with spices," said the sire of Montmorency.

"Do you know, noble seigneurs," put in Walter the Penniless, "that there are comrades, luckier or wiser than we, who never suffered hunger in the Holy Land, and whose faces are fresh and ruddy?"

"Who are they, valliant chevalier?"

"The King of the Vagabonds and his band."

"The wretches who ate up the Saracens, and regaled themselves with human flesh?"

"Seigneurs," remarked Robert Courte-Heuse, Duke of Normandy, "we must not run down Saracen flesh."

"These feasts on human flesh," explained the seigneur of Sabran, "are not at all wonderful. My grandfather once told me that, during the famous famine of 1033, the plebs fed on one another."

"I remember one evening," added Walter the Pennyless, "when I and my friend Cuckoo Peter had a famous supper——"

"And what has become of that Peter the Hermit?" inquired Gerhard, Duke of Roussillon, interrupting the Gascon adventurer. "It is now a month since he left us. We have not heard from him since. Is he dead or alive?"

"He has gone to join the army of Godfrey, Duke of Bouillon, who we are to connect with before Jerusalem," answered Walter. "But allow me, noble seigneurs, to tell you my tale. As I was saying, one evening, at the camp before Edessa, Cuckoo Peter and I, attracted by a delicious kitchen odor, that spread from the quarter of the King of the Vagabonds, walked into their quarters, and their worthy monarch made us sup on a tender roast, so fat, so toothsomely seasoned with saffron, salt and thyme, that I swear by my good sword, the Sweetheart of the Faith, Cuckoo Peter and I licked our chops! What a morsel!"

"We should not enlarge in that manner upon abominable feasts on human flesh, seigneurs," said the legate; "we should entertain ourselves with some other subject more pleasing and pious. If you are willing, I shall tell you of a miracle that we are preparing for to-morrow."

"What miracle, holy man?" inquired the Crusaders. "What a lucky windfall!"

"A prodigious miracle, my children, which will be one of the most telling triumphs of Christianity. Peter Barthelmy, deacon of Marseilles, had a vision after the capture of Antioch. Saint Andrew appeared before him and said: 'Go into the church of my brother Peter, situated at the gate of the city. Dig up the earth at the foot of the main altar, and you will find the iron of the lance that pierced the side of the Redeemer of the world. That mystic iron, carried at the head of the army, will insure

the victory of the Christians and will pierce the hearts of the infidels.' Peter Barthelmy having communicated to me this miraculous vision, I assembled six bishops and six seigneurs, the most pious and pure. We went to the church. The earth was dug up in our presence at the foot of the main altar—and—to our stupefaction——"

"The iron of the holy lance was found!" interrupted William IX, in a roar of laughter, relapsing into his habitual incredulity.

"You deceive yourself, sinner!" answered the legate. "Peter Barthelmy found nothing in that hole. What a misfortune that a man, who so passionately hates the Jews, should be incredulous to such a degree! But sooner or later the grace of heaven will descend upon you. Meantime I shall confound your incredulity. The lance's iron was not then found. But Peter Barthelmy, moved by a new inspiration of Saint Andrew, threw himself into the hole, dug in it with his nails, and finally did discover the iron of the holy lance. To-morrow, the deacon is to walk across a burning pyre, in order to demonstrate, in plain view of all, the virtue of that precious relic, that will render him insensible to the flames. The miracle is assured——"

"A truce with your idle talk!" said William, interrupting the legate. "Halloo, there, cup-bearers, equerries, bring the dice, the checks, my casket of gold, and fetch in the dancers. After a banquet, there's nothing like a cup in one hand, the dice in the other, and beautiful girls in sight, dancing, naked or in gauze!"

"To the game, to the game!" cried the Crusaders. "Equerries, fetch the dice, bring in the dancers and withdraw!"

The orders of the Duke of Aquitaine were executed. The domestics of his household placed under the galleries and near the divans little Saracen tables of sculptured ivory, on which they laid the checks and dice. The Crusaders, in keeping with their unbridled passion for gambling, had provided themselves with fat purses of gold besans, now handed to them by their lackeys. During the tumult due to the preparations for the

games and the removal of the seigneurs from the tables to the divans under the gallery, Azenor, her features distorted by the tortures of jealousy, convulsively grasped the arm of the Duke of Aquitaine, who at that moment was opening a casket filled with gold, and whispered to him in a hollow and excited voice: "William, you gave the order to bring in women hardly clad and even naked!"

"That's so, my charmer, and you heard the grateful applause of my guests!"

"Who are those women?"

"Dancers, the joy of banqueters after a feast. Beauties who have nothing to refuse——"

"Whence come they?"

"From the land of marvels, India!"

"Take care! Do not drive me to extremes! Hell burns in my heart! Woe is me! Those creatures here, and under my very eyes? You know that jealousy turns me crazy!"

The Duke of Aquitaine answered his mistress with bantering nonchalance, and drew near a group of seigneurs who were looking at a troop of girls that had just burst into the banquet hall. Noticeable above all were Perrette and Yolande, the former always brazen and challenging. Already the Crusaders, inflamed with wine and amorousness, acclaimed the troop with cries of vulgar license, when Maria announced in a loud voice: "One moment, noble seigneurs, reserve your enthusiasm for the treasure of youth, of beauty and of charms that I hold under this veil and who is about to dazzle your charmed eyes!"

Saying this, the shrew pointed to a confused form, hidden under a long white veil that trailed on the floor. Astonishment and curiosity calmed for a moment the impure ardor of the Crusaders. A deep silence ensued. The eyes of all sought to penetrate the semi-transparency of the veil, when suddenly the Duke of Aquitaine cried out: "Gentlemen, it is my opinion that that aster of beauty must be the reward of that cavalier who displayed the greatest valor at the siege of Marhala!"

"Yes, yes!" responded the Crusaders. "That's right! That treasure must be the prize of the most valorous!"

"I shall not, then, be gainsaid by any," proceeded the Duke of Aquitaine, "when I proclaim that Heracle, the seigneur of Polignac, showed himself the bravest among the brave at the siege of this city." Cries of approval received William's words, who went on saying: "Heracle, seigneur of Polignac, yours is that treasure of beauty! Yours alone the privilege of unveiling that radiant aster that will dazzle us all!"

The seigneur of Polignac eagerly broke through the group of Crusaders, while Perrette exclaimed banteringly, affecting despair: "Oh, cruel man, you leave me for a miraculous beauty!" and catching the eye of William she cried out: "My handsome duke will console me for all my sorrows!"

"By Venus!" said William in great glee, "welcome to you, my ribald! Come to my arms, and all sensuous pleasure along with you!"

"Your Azenor will strangle me!"

"The devil take Azenor! Long live Love!"

During this short dialogue between the Duke of Aquitaine and Perrette, the seigneur of Polignac had approached the veiled woman, and raised the gauze that concealed from the eyes of all the prize of the most valiant. The surprise and discomfiture of the Crusaders were first expressed by mute stupor. Before them stood poor Joan the Hunchback, on her head an enormous red turban stuck with peacock's feathers, and a short skirt of the same color on her body, fastened at her waist and completely exposing her sad deformity. By her side, little Colombaik pressed himself close to his mother, and was dressed in a flowing tunic, his hair curled and perfumed, but his eyes and ears covered by a bandage. "I consent to serve as your toy, to endure all humiliations, seeing you have promised to provide for my child and not to separate me from him," were the words of Joan to Maria before lending herself to this cruel buffoonery; "but I insist, in the name of my dignity as mother, in the name of my child's chas-

tity, to cover his eyes and ears, that he may not be a witness of his mother's degradation."

At sight of Joan the Hunchback, the Crusaders, first stupified, soon broke out in loud peals of laughter, which were redoubled by the disappointment that Heracle of Polignac seemed to labor under. Still under the effects of his discomfiture, he gazed open-mouthed at Joan.

At that moment, livid, her features distorted with jealousy, Azenor was running from one Crusader to another, asking where William had gone to. But the seigneurs, half intoxicated and unconcerned at the sufferings of the love-sick woman, answered her with jests. "Let's carry the hunchback in triumph!" exclaimed several voices in the midst of deafening peals of laughter.

Joan paled with fear. Resigned beforehand to all sorts of jests and humiliations, she had not foreseen such an excess of indignity. Trembling and distracted, the poor woman dropped upon her knees and holding her child in her arms, she muttered amid sobs: "My poor child! Why did we not die with your father in the sands of the desert!" Already, despite Joan's tears, the Crusaders were seizing her, when a great uproar broke out in one of the chambers that opened into the gallery. Immediately, menacing and terrible to behold, Fergan the Quarryman threw himself into the middle of the hall armed with a cudgel and calling out loudly to Joan and Colombaik.

"Fergan!" "Father!" the woman and the child cried out together. At the sound of their voices, Fergan rushed across the group of Crusaders swinging his heavy stick and distributing such hard blows before him to the right and to the left, that the seigneurs, stunned and frightened, retreated precipitately before the serf. Beating his way through them, Fergan joined at last his wife and child, and pressed them to his heart in a passionate embrace. The domestics, thrown down, trodden under foot and half killed by Fergan, rose out of breath and explained to the seigneurs: "We were standing at the gate, playing chuck-farthing, when this madman ran up to us from the direction of the

market-place. He asked us whether a hunchback and her child had been taken to the palace. 'Yes,' said we, 'and just now they are the amusement of the noble guests of our seigneur, the Duke of Aquitaine.' The madman then threw himself upon us, ran through the gate of the palace, struck us with his cane, and got here."

"He must be hanged on the spot!" the Duke of Normandy cried out. "These pillars will do for a gibbet. Fetch cords!"

"That bandit has dared to threaten us with his cudgel! He deserves the gallows!"

"Death to the criminal! Death!" cried out the Crusaders, now recovered from their first stupor, "Death to the vagabond!"

"But where is the Duke of Aquitaine? No one can be hanged here without his consent."

"He disappeared with the queen of the wenches. But his absence should not delay the execution of this wretch. When he returns he will find the vagabond hanging high and dry. William will ratify the sentence, and approve it."

"I shall give my belt for a rope."

After embracing his wife and child, Fergan took in at a glance the gravity of the situation, and observed that the seigneurs were not armed. Profiting by their first surprise, he had his wife and child climb on the banquet table and ordered them to stand with their backs against the marble edge of the basin. Thereupon, placing himself before them, his heavy cudgel in hand, he made ready for a desperate defence. But still wishing to try a last means of escape, he addressed the Crusaders, who were about to assault him: "For pity's sake, let me depart from this palace with my wife and child!"

"Listen to the bandit, praying for mercy! Quick! Let one of these pillars serve him for a gibbet. Swing a rope around his neck!"

"You may hang me!" cried out the serf in despair, "but more than one of you will have to fall under my cudgel!"

The threat rekindled the fury of the Crusaders. Already,

braving the rapid swing of Fergan's cudgel, several seigneurs were rushing forward to seize the serf, when suddenly the braying of clarions was heard from afar, together with loud and nearing cries of: "To arms! The Saracens are upon us! To arms! To the ramparts!" Several men-at-arms of the Duke of Aquitaine rushed into the hall, sword in hand, and calling out: "The Saracens have profited by the night to surprise the city. They have entered near the gate of Agra by the breech that we made. They are fighting on the ramparts. To arms, seigneurs, to arms! Duke of Aquitaine, to arms!" Hardly had these men-at-arms pronounced the name of the duke in the midst of the increasing tumult caused by the announcement of this unforeseen attack, than William IX. appeared, his clothes in disorder, coming out of one of the chambers that opened into the gallery. He was pale and terror-stricken, and held in his hands a parchment, while he cried in a terrified voice: "A Jewess! A Jewess! Damnation!"

"William, arm yourself!" his companions called out to him, as they precipitately rushed out with the men-at-arms. "The Saracens are attacking the city! Let's run to the ramparts! To arms!"

"A Jewess!" repeated the Duke of Aquitaine with eyes fixed, his brow bathed in perspiration, and seeming neither to hear nor to see his companions in arms. Perceiving the legate of the Pope, William threw himself on his knees at the feet of the prelate: "Holy father, have pity upon me! I am damned! While I was chatting with the queen of the wenches, Azenor entered the chamber where we were and, holding out this parchment, said to me she was a Jewess, and that the parchment, written in Hebrew, furnished the proof. I have been a miserable sinner. Holy father, have pity upon me! I am damned! Mercy for my soul! Upon my knees I ask you for absolution!"

CHAPTER V.

THE KING OF THE VAGABONDS.

At dawn, the sun rose over the plain that surrounds the city of Marhala, surprised at night by the Saracens and defended by the Crusaders. The infidels, relying more on their audacity than on their numbers, perished almost to a man in the assault. Only a small number of prisoners were taken. The approaches of the breech in the ramparts, not far from the gate of Agra, through which the Saracens sought to surprise the city, disappeared under a heap of corpses. Clouds of vultures hovered over that abundant quarry, but dared not yet let themselves down on it. Men of prey were ahead of the birds.

These men, wholly naked, red and dripping blood, and hideous to behold, went and came like geniuses of death in the midst of that field of carnage. They would seize the body of a Saracen, strip it of its clothes, roll that in a bundle, and then, kneeling over the naked corpse, they pried open its jaws, rigid in death, carefully felt about in its mouth and under its tongue; finally, with the aid of long knives, they would cut open the corpse's gullet, chest and bowels, whose intestines they then pulled out and examined. Their faces, hands and members streaming blood, these demons were under the command of a chief. He gave orders and directed their sacrilegious profanations. They called him their king. It was Corentin the Gibbet-cheater, become chief of the vagabonds. His seneschal, one-time serf of the seigniory of Plouernel, was the identical Bacon-cutter, who, with a blow of his pitchfork had thrown Garin the Serf-eater from his horse just before the latter was butchered by the villagers.

The King of the Vagabonds and his seneschal gave token of

rare dexterity in their shocking trade. The two had just seized, one by the head the other by the feet, the corpse of a young Saracen. His face, his rich raiment, hacked by sabre blows, the bodies of several Crusaders stretched on either side of him—all bespoke the fierce resistance the warrior must have offered. "Oh, oh!" said the King of the Vagabonds, "that dog must have been some chieftain, it can be seen by his embroidered green caftan. Great pity that his dress is so slashed to pieces; it might have served as a mantle for Perrette."

"You still think of the Ribald?" asked the Bacon-cutter, helping Corentin to strip the Saracen of his clothes; "your Perrette is in the Paradise of the wenches, on the crupper of some canon, or in the harem of some emir."

"Seneschal, Perrette would leave Paradise, an emir or a canon if the Gibbet-cheater told her to. Come. Our corpse is now naked. Make a bundle of the clothes. They will find purchasers in the market-place of Marhala. Now that we have taken the peel from this Syrian fruit," he added, pointing to the dead body, "let's open it. It is inside that the precious almonds must be looked for, such as besans of gold and precious stones. Give me your knife. I wish to sharpen it against mine. The blade of mine has been dulled on the gullet of that old Saracen yonder with the white beard. The devil! His cartilage was as tough as that of an old goat," and while his seneschal was bundling up some clothes, the King of the Vagabonds sharpened his knife, casting upon the corpses strewn around him looks of satisfied covetousness, and remarked: "That's what it means to get up early in the morning. After their night's fight, the Crusaders have gone to sleep. When they will come to plunder the dead, we shall be at the dice!"

"Great King! It is an easy matter to rise early if one has not gone to bed. We arrived in time to gather the harvest on this field of carnage."

"Will you, vagabonds, still reproach me for having induced you to leave the fortress of the Marquis of Jaffa?" replied the

king, continuing to sharpen his knife. "Think of lying in a stronghold in order to play the brigand in Palestine! It was folly!"

"And yet, many of those new seigneurs who have left themselves down in the Holy Land as dukes, marquises, counts and barons, begin everywhere, just as they used to in Gaul, to ply the trade of highwaymen on the mainroads."

"With this difference, seneschal, that there are no high roads here, and hardly anybody to rob. One must roam over ten or twelve miles of sand or rocks in order to meet a few thin troops of travelers, who, instead of kindly allowing themselves to be plundered, like the townsmen and merchants of Gaul, but too often strike back, show their teeth and use them too."

"Great King! You speak wisely. Indeed, during those two months spent with the Marquis of Jaffa, we made but two sorry finds. At one of these, by the faith of the Bacon-cutter, we were warmly curried and rudely beaten, and all for almost nothing."

"In exchange, this fine Saracen quarry awaited us this morning at the gates of Marhala. Our work done, we shall take a dip in the fountain sheltered by yonder cluster of date trees. Thanks to the bath, we, who are now red as skinned eels, shall become again white as little doves, after which, having but to take the pick of these Saracen wardrobes, and our pouches well filled, we shall make our royal entry in the best tavern of Marhala."

"Where, mayhap, you will find again your queen, tapping for the customers and sleeping with them."

"May heaven hear you, seneschal, and may the devil grant me my prayers! Now, quick to work. The sun is rising. We are naked and run the risk of being roasted by the sun before we are through. The bath first, the feast afterwards."

"That word 'roasting' reminds me that this young Saracen is plump and of good muscle. In due time, what a fine mess would not a fillet of his large loins and round calves make, seasoned with some aromatic herbs and a pinch of saffron! Do you re-

member, among other ragouts, the head of that old sahib of the mountain, boiled with a certain peppery sauce?"

"Seneschal, my friend, you are altogether too talkative. Instead of incessantly opening your mouth, whence flow only vain words, open that of this Saracen, and perhaps beautiful besans of gold or diamond of Bossorah may roll out."

It was a shocking spectacle, like the violation of a sepulchre. The King of the Vagabonds took the head of the corpse between his knees, while the Bacon-cutter tried to force open the rigid jaws of the dead body. Unable to do so he said to Corentin: "That dog of an infidel must have been in a rage at the moment of expiring. His teeth are clenched like a vice."

"And that embarasses you, you gosling? Insert the blade of your knife between his teeth, flat, then turn it round. That will separate the jaws sufficiently to be able to insert your fingers." And while the Bacon-cutter was conducting his abominable researches obedient to the directions of Corentin, the latter remarked with a ferocious sneer: "Oh, ye miscreant Saracens, you have the malignity of hiding in the hollow of your cheeks gold pieces and precious stones, and even of swallowing them, to the end of depriving the soldiers of Christ of those riches!"

"Nothing!" exclaimed the seneschal with disappointment and interrupting the king, "nothing in the cheeks and nothing under the tongue."

"Have you felt carefully?"

"I have felt and felt over again, everywhere. Perhaps during this night's battle, some foxy Crusader, like a man of experience, have seized the throat of this Saracen at the moment when he expired and may thus have caused him to spit out the gold he was hiding in his mouth. Provided that dog did not swallow it all down."

"The scamp was capable of doing that. Feel about in his throat. After that we shall sound the chest and bowels." So said, so done. The two monsters put the corpse through a shocking butchery. Finally their ferocious cupidity was satisfied.

After a series of revolting profanations, they withdrew from the bleeding intestines of the corpse three diamonds, a ruby and five besans of gold, small thick pieces but barely the size of a denier. While the two vagabonds were finishing their ghoulish work, black clouds of thick and nauseous smoke rose from a pyre, started close by, by the other vagabonds, with green branches of turpentine tree. These fellows, instead of disemboweling the corpses, burned them, in order to look among the ashes for the gold and precious stones which the Saracens might have swallowed. These monstrosities having been gone through, the vagabonds proceeded to the neighboring spring where they washed their bloody bodies, and donned their clothes again, or decked themselves with the spoils of the Saracens. The booty was then divided—clothes, arms, turbans, shoes—and they wended their steps towards the gate of Agra. At the moment of entering the city, the King of the Vagabonds, mounting a heap of ruins, said to his men, who gathered around him: "Vagabonds, my sons and beloved subjects! We are about to enter Marhala, with booty on back and bysantins in pocket. I expect, I will it, I order it, in the name of wine, dice and wenches, that, before leaving Marhala, we shall have become again as beggarly as the vagabonds that we are! Never forget our rule: 'A true vagabond, twenty-four hours after a pillage, must have nothing left but his skin and his knife.' He who keeps a denier becomes cold to the quarry. He is expelled from my kingdom!"

"Yes, yes! Long live our King! Three cheers for wine, dice and wenches!" responded the bandits. "The devil take the vagabond, who, rich to-day, keeps for the morrow aught but his skin and his knife! Long live our great King, Corentin the Gibbet-cheater!"

And the savage troop marched towards the gate of Agra and entered the city of Marhala shouting and signing: "Glory to the brave Crusaders!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARKET-PLACE OF MARHALA.

Luckily disentangled from the fury of the guests of the Duke of Aquitaine by the nocturnal attack of the Saracens, Fergan the Quarryman had profited by the confusion to escape from the Emir's palace with Joan and Colombaik. While the Crusaders were hurrying to the ramparts of the gate of Agra, the serf turned his steps with wife and child, far away from the spot of the battle. Before sunrise, quiet reigned again in Marhala. Descrying one of those numerous taverns, that generally sprang up after the capture of a city, and were set up in some Saracen house by the camp-followers of the army, Fergan stepped in. To the great astonishment of Joan, he pulled out of his belt a gold piece, which he exchanged with the tavern-keeper for silver coin, to pay for his lodging. Once more alone with his family, the quarryman could give a loose to his tender feelings and relate to them how, after being separated from them by the sand-spout, he found himself half buried under the sand, and losing consciousness. In the darkness of the night he was shaken out of his lethargy by a sharp scratch on his shoulder. It was a hyena, that, pawing up the sand under which he lay, prepared to devour him, taking him for dead, but instantly fled seeing him sit up Thus, delivered from a double danger, the serf had wandered about during dark, amidst the mournful yelpings of the wild beasts at their quarry over the corpses that they dug up. At dawn he saw, already half devoured, the remains of Neroweg VI.

After vainly searching for Joan and his child, Fergan considered them lost forever, and followed the route marked out by the human bones. At the end of several hours' marching, he

came across the corpse of some seigneur, to judge by the richness of his clothes, torn to shreds by the beasts of prey. Among the tatters was an embroidered purse full of gold. He appropriated it without scruple, and was soon joined by a troop of travelers bound for Marhala. He journeyed in their company. Upon his arrival in the city, and learning that several other travelers who escaped the disaster of the sand-spout had come in ahead of him, he inquired after a deformed woman with a child. A beggar, who had accidentally seen Joan and her son enter the palace of the Emir, gave him the information, and he was enabled to arrive in time to wrest them from the danger they were just threatened with.

After a recital of his adventures, and leaving his wife and Colombaik in the tavern, Fergan went out at sunrise to purchase some clothing at the market-place, where booty was constantly sold at auction. Fearing to be met by some of the guests of the Duke of Aquitaine, the serf had smeared soot mixed with grease over his face. Rendered thus unrecognizable, he entered the market-place. Instead, however, of finding the place occupied by traffickers in booty, he saw a large gang of men hastily engaged in the construction of a pyre under the overseership of several prelates. A cordon of soldiers, placed at a distance from the pyre, kept the inquisitive from drawing too near. Fergan had just elbowed himself to the front of the mob, when a deacon, clad in black, said aloud: "Are there among you any strong men who wish to earn two deniers, and help finish the pyre quickly? They shall be paid the moment the work is done."

"I shall help, if wanted," answered Fergan. Two deniers were worth earning. They would eke out his treasury.

"Come," said the priest, "you seem to be a lusty fellow. The faggots will weigh like straws on your broad shoulders." Five or six other wretches, having volunteered to join Fergan, the deacon took them to the center of the place, where, resting upon a large bundle of trunks of olive trees, palmettos and dried brushes, the pyre was being erected for the accomplishment of

the miracle announced by Peter Barthelmy, the Marseilles priest and possessor of the Holy Lance. This Barthelmy derived a large revenue from his relic by exhibiting it for money to the veneration of the Crusaders. Other priests, jealous of the receipts pocketed by the Marseillan, had assiduously backbitten his lance. Fearing a decline of earnings, and wishing to furnish a proof of the virtue of his lance, and at the same time confound his detractors, he had promised a miracle. Fergan set to work with ardor to earn his two deniers. He soon perceived that a narrow path crossed the heap of kindling-wood, which, about thirty feet long and raised four or five feet on either side, sloped down towards the path that cut it in two. Thus, towards the middle and for a space about two yards wide, the pyre offered hardly any food to the fire. After a half hour's work, Fergan said to the deacon: "We shall make the heap even, and fill up the gap that crosses it, so that the pyre may burn everywhere."

"Not at all!" the deacon hastened to say. "Your work is done on this side. We must now set up the stake and adjust the spit."

Fergan, as well as his companions, curious to know the purpose of the stake and spit, followed the priest. A wagon hitched to mules, had just dumped several beams upon the place. One of these, about fifteen feet high, and furnished in some places with iron rings and chains, had at about its center a sort of support for the feet. Fergan's helpers followed the instructions of the deacon, and set up the stake at one of the corners of the pyre where the kindling wood was well heaped. Other workingmen placed not far away two iron X's, intended to support an iron bar about eight feet long and tapering into sharp points.

"Oh! oh! What a terrible looking spit!" said Fergan to the priest, placing the iron bar on the two X's with no little labor. "Are they going to roast an ox?" Instead of answering the serf, the deacon listened in the direction of one of the streets that ran into the place, and, hastily fumbling in his pockets, said to Fergan and the other men, while handing to each the promised

wages: "Your work is done. You may now go. The procession is approaching."

Fergan and his assistants withdrew to the mob which the file of soldiers was holding back from the pyre. Church songs were heard, at first from a distance, but drawing ever nearer, and soon the religious procession issued into the market-place. Monks marched at the head, after them clergymen carrying crosses and banners, and then, in the midst of a group of high dignitaries of the Church, whose mitres and gold embroidered copes sparkled in the sun of the Orient, came the Marseilles priest, Peter Barthelmy, bare-footed and robed in a white shirt. He held up triumphantly in his hands the holy and miraculous lance. This contriver of miracles, of a countenance at once sanctimonious, artful and sly, preceded other prelates carrying banners. Azenor the Pale came next, clad in a long black robe, her hands bound behind and supported by two monks. She had been convicted of the abominable crime of being a Jewess. She was convicted of this enormity, not alone by the revelation that, in a paroxysm of jealousy, she had made to William IX., but also by the testimony of the parchment that she had handed to him in order to dispel his doubts. In that parchment, written in the Hebrew language and dating several years back, the father of Azenor urged his daughter to die faithful to the law of Israel. A few steps behind the victim, William IX., the Duke of Aquitaine, his hair in disorder and covered with ashes, dragged himself on his naked knees in abject penitence. Clad in a rough sack, his feet bare and dusty like his knees, and holding a crucifix in his two hands, the penitent cried out ever and anon in a lamenting voice, while smiting his chest with his fist: *"Mea culpa, mea culpa!* Lord God, have mercy upon my soul! I have committed the sin of the flesh with an unclean Jewess, I am damned without your grace! Oh, Lord, *mea culpa! mea culpa!"* On foot and in splendid raiment, the legate of the Pope and the archbishop of Tyre, marched on either side of the Duke of Aquitaine, repeat-

ing from time to time in a voice loud enough to be heard by the penitent:

"My child in Christ, trust in the mercy of the Lord! Render yourself worthy of His clemency by your repentance!"

"Remain faithful to your vow of chastity, you who were given to debauchery!"

"Remain faithful to your vow of poverty, you who were given to prodigality and magnificence!"

"Remain faithful to your vow of humility, you who were proud and arrogant!"

"But that will not suffice! You must surrender to the Church your earthly riches—lands, domains, castles, slaves—to the end that the priests may implore the Eternal for the remission of your transgressions and your numerous sins!"

Behind these followed a few Saracens who had been captured at the late night surprise of Marhala. They were led, pinioned, by soldiers. The King of the Vagabonds, his seneschal the Bacon-cutter and several of the men of their band had been joined to this escort by order of Bohemond, Prince of Taranto, and chief of the army, who himself closed the procession, accompanied by a large number of crusading seigneurs, casque on head and lance in hand.

This funeral train marched around the market-place, surrounded by an ever-swelling crowd, and ranked itself before the pyre, where the stake and the spit were in readiness.

"The miracle of the lance!" cried the crowd, impatient to see Barthelmy cross a flaming pyre in his shirt and without burning—"the miracle of the lance!"

"Woe is me!" muttered William IX., redoubling the blows with which he was lacerating his breast. "Woe is me! I am so great a sinner that perhaps the Eternal will not deign to manifest His omnipotence by a prodigy before me!"

"Be comforted, my son! answered the papal legate. "The Eternal will manifest Himself in order to confirm your faith,

seeing that you have been touched by grace, and humble yourself before His Church."

"Yesterday, father, I was an unclean criminal, an infamous evildoer, a miserable blind man. To-day my eyes are open to the truth. I see the everlasting flames that await me. Have pity upon me!"

"Give up all your goods to the Church, remain poor as Job, the Church will then intercede for your salvation," replied the legate, issuing his orders to his deacon to set fire to the pyre.

Immediately, walking almost without danger over the length of the path that crossed the paling, hidden by the height of the flames kindled at the four sides of the pyre, Peter Barthelmy seemed in the eyes of the credulous multitude actually to traverse the lake of fire. The serf saw, across a thick cloud of smoke that helped to increase the illusion, Peter Barthelmy, looking as if he was wading through flames up to the hip, run rapidly across the full length of the pyre, from which he emerged again brandishing his lance. The crowd, blind and fanatic, clapped their hands and shouted: "A miracle! A miracle!" Shocked at the impudence of the friar, who so shamelessly imposed upon the credulity of those poor people, Fergan decided to administer to him a stinging lesson. Affecting to yield to religious enthusiasm, he cried out: "Peter Barthelmy is a saint, a great saint! Whoever can secure the smallest bit of his clothing, or of his blessed body, even if but one hair, will be delivered of all ills!" The mob received Fergan's suggestion with fanatic approval. The file of soldiers, that held the multitude far enough back from the pyre, was broken through, and the most maniacal of these fanatics rushed upon Peter Barthelmy at the moment when, leaving the pyre a few steps behind him, he was brandishing his lance. An incredible scene ensued thereupon, related by Bauldry, archbishop of Dole, an eye-witness of the occurrence, as follows in his "History of the Capture of Jerusalem:"

"When Peter Barthelmy emerged from the pyre with his holy lance, the crowd rushed upon him and trampled him under foot,

each wishing to touch him and carry off a piece of his shirt. He received several wounds in the legs. Bits of flesh were cut from his body. His ribs were knocked in. His spine was fractured. He would, in our opinion, have died on the spot, had not Raymond, seigneur of Pelet, an illustrious cavalier, quickly gathered a platoon of soldiers, thrown himself with them into the midst of the mob, and, at the risk of his own life, saved poor Peter Barthelmy."

After this rude lesson given the cheat, Fergan approached the group of soldiers that were transporting the contriver of miracles in a dying state to a neighboring house. "The accursed brutes! The savages!" murmured the Marseilles priest, gasping for breath: "Have you ever seen such bedeviled rascals! The idea of wishing to turn me into relics!"

"It is but a condign punishment for the besotted state of mind that, with infamous calculation, you plunge these wretched people in," said Fergan leaning over Barthelmy. The Marseillian turned around with a sudden start, but the serf had disappeared in the crowd, and passed to the other side of the pyre, now fully ablaze. At one of its corners was Azenor, chained to the stake. Her feet rested on the tablet which the flames began to lick. A few steps from the victim, on his knees among the priests and joining them in their mortuary songs, crouched the Duke of Aquitaine, from time to time crying amid sobs: "Lord! Cleanse me of my sins! May my repentance and the just punishment of this unclean Jewess earn grace for me!"

"Ah, William!" cried out the condemned woman with a voice still strong and penetrating, "I feel the heat of the flames. They are about to reduce my body to ashes. These flames are less consuming than those of jealousy. Yesterday, driven to extremity, I made certain of my vengeance. A few instants of suffering will rid me of life, and your credulous stupidity avenges me. Look at yourself now, brilliant Duke of Aquitaine, the sport of priests, your implacable enemies, and the dupe of those who laugh at your imbecile fears! If there is a hell we shall meet there."

"Silence, you infamous and unclean beast!" cried out the legate of the Pope, "the flames that envelop you are as nothing to the everlasting fires where you are to burn through all eternity. A curse upon your execrable race, that crucified the Saviour of the world!"

"A curse upon the Jews! Death to the Jews! Glory to God in heaven and to his priests on earth!" shouted the spectators.

Suddenly, heart-rending screams rose above the din. Azenor the Pale, writhed with pain under her iron fetters as the flames, reaching her limbs, set her robe and long hair on fire. Presently the stake at which she was chained caught fire under her feet, swayed in the air for an instant, tumbled over into the furnace, and disappeared there with the victim in the midst of a wild flare of flames. The Duke of Aquitaine then embraced the knees of the papal legate and appealed to him imploringly: "Oh, my father in Christ, I vow to relinquish all my goods to our holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church! I vow to follow the Crusade barefooted in a sack! I vow to bury myself in the depths of a cloister upon my return to Gaul! I vow to die in the austerities of penance, to the end that I may obtain from God the remission of my sins and evil ways!"

"In the name of the All-Powerful, I take cognizance of your vows, William IX., Duke of Aquitaine!" responded the legate in ringing and solemn voice. "Only the observance of these vows can render you worthy of a day of celestial mercy, thanks to the intercession of the Church!" And the Duke of Aquitaine, bent low at the feet of the legate, his forehead in the dust, repeated his protestations and lamentations, while the King of the Vagabonds, stepping out of the file of soldiers that surrounded the Saracen prisoners, and accompanied by his seneschal the Bacon-cutter, approached the legate, saying:

"Holy father in God, I have come with my seneschal and a few of my subjects for the purpose of spitting one of those Saracen miscreants over the fire. You have but to deliver the victim to me."

"That belongs to Bohemond, Prince of Taranto," the legate answered the King of the Vagabonds, pointing with his finger to a group of crusading seigneurs who had just witnessed the miracle of Peter Barthelmy and the death of Azenor the Pale. The Prince of Taranto approached Corentin and speaking in a low voice led him to the side where the iron spit lay placed on the iron X's. Then, drawing near the escort that surrounded the prisoners, the prince made a sign. The soldiers parted ranks, and five bound Saracens faced Bohemond and the other Crusaders. Two of these prisoners, a father and son, were particularly remarkable, one by his noble and calm face, framed in a long white beard, the other by the bold and juvenile beauty of his lineaments. The old man, wounded in the head and arm at the night attack, had torn a few pieces of his long mantle of white wool to bandage his and his son's wounds. Their superb scarfs of Tyrian wool, their silk caftans, embroidered with gold, although soiled with blood and dust, announced the rank of the chiefs. Thanks to an Armenian priest, who served as interpreter, they held the following discourse with the Prince of Taranto, who, addressing himself to the old man, said:

"Were you the chief of those infidel dogs who attempted to surprise the city of Marhala by night?"

"Yes, Nazarean; you and yours have carried war into our country. We defend ourselves against the invaders."

"By the cross on my sword! vile miscreant, dare you question the right of the soldiers of Christ to this land?"

"The same as I inherited my father's horse and black tent, Syria belongs to us, the children of those who conquered it from the Greeks. Our conquest was not pitiless like yours. When Abubeker Alwakel, the successor of the Prophet, sent Yzed-Ben-Sophian to conquer Syria, he said to him: 'You and your warriors shall behave like valliant men in battle, but kill neither old men, women nor children. Destroy neither fruit trees nor harvests. They are presents of Allah to man. If you meet with Christian hermits in the solitudes, serving God and labor-

ing with their hands, do them no harm. As to the Greek priests, who, without setting nation against nation, sincerely honor God in the faith of Jesus, the son of Mary, we used be to them a protecting shield, because, without regarding Jesus as a God, we venerate him as a great, wise man, the founder of the Christian religion. But we abhor the doctrine that certain priests have drawn from the otherwise so pure doctrine of the son of Mary.'"

These words of the old emir, absolutely in keeping with the truth, and that contrasted so nobly with the cruelty of the soldiers of the cross, exasperated Bohemond. "I swear by Christ, the dead and resurrected God," he cried out, "you shall pay dearly for these sacrilegious words!"

"Be faithful to your faith, even unto the peril of your life said the Prophet," the Saracen replied. "I am in your power, Nazarean. Your threats will not keep me from telling the truth. God is God!"

"The truth," added emir's son, "is that you Franks have invaded our country, ravaging our fields, massacring our wives and children, profanating the corpses!"

"Silence, my son!" resumed the emir in a grave voice. "Mahomet said it: *The strength of the just man is in the calmness of his reasoning and in the justice of his cause."* The young man held his peace, and his father proceeded, addressing the Prince of Taranto: "I told you the truth; I feel sorry for you if you are ignorant of, or deny it. Our people, separated from yours by the immensity of the seas and vast territories, could not harm your nation. We have respected the hermits and the Christian priests. Their monasteries rise in the midst of the fertile plains of Syria, their basilicas glisten in our cities beside our mosques. In the name of Abraham, the father of us all—Musselmen, Jews and Christians—we have welcomed like brothers your pilgrims, who came to Jerusalem to worship the sepulchre of Jesus, and his wise men. The Christians exercised their religion in peace, for Allah, the God of the Prophet,

said through the mouth of Mahomet, the Prophet of God: *Injure no one on account of his religion.* But our mildness has emboldened your priests. They have incited the Christians against us; they have outraged our creed, pretending theirs alone is true and that Satan inspired our prayers. We long remained patient. A thousand times the stronger in numbers, we could have exterminated the Christians. We limited ourselves to imprisoning them. Those of your priests who outraged us and sowed discord in our country, were punished according to our laws. You then came by the thousands from beyond the seas, you invaded our country, and you have let loose upon us the most atrocious ills. Our priests then preached a holy war; we have defended ourselves, and we shall continue to do so. God protects the faithful!"

The calmness of the old emir exasperated the Crusaders. He would have been torn to pieces, together with his son and companions, but for the intervention of Bohemond, who with gesture and voice reined in the seigneurs. Addressing himself thereupon to the Saracen by means of the interpreter, he said: "You deserve death a hundred times, but I forgive you!"

"I shall report your generosity to my people."

"Be it so! But you shall also say to them: 'The Prince governor of the city and the seigneurs have to-day decided in council that all Saracens, henceforth captured, shall be killed and roasted, to serve as meat with their bodies to the seigneurs as well as to the army.'"[1]

The Prince of Taranto, while speaking and acting like a cannibal, was following the inspiration of an atrocious policy. He knew that the eating of human flesh inspired the Mahometans with extreme horror, seeing they professed for their dead a religious veneration. Accordingly, Bohemond expected to conjure up such fear among the Saracens that it would paralyze their resistence, and they would no longer fight, fearing to fall

[1] William, Archbishop of Tyre, reports this frightful address in his history of the Crusaders.

dead or alive in the hands of the soldiers of Christ, and be devoured by them.[2]

At the order of the Prince of Taranto, the King of the Vagabonds seized the emir's son, and, while the soldiers held the other prisoners back to compel them to witness the revolting spectacle, the young Saracen was slaughtered, disembowelled, spitted and broiled over the burning embers of the pyre that had just been the theatre of the miracle of Peter Barthelmy and of the death of Azenor the Jewess; and in the presence of the crusading seigneurs, of the legate of the Pope and of the clergy, the Sacaren youth was devoured by the band of Corentin the Gibbet-cheater, assisted by the other wretches, whom a fury of fanatical self-glorification drove to join the anthropophagous feast. This done, the father of the victim and his companions were freed from their bonds and set at liberty, a liberty, however, that the old man did not profit from. He dropped dead on the spot with grief and horror. Another Saracen went crazy with horror; the other two fled distracted from the fated city.

The frightful scene was hardly over, when messengers from Godfrey of Boullion arrived, notifying Bohemond to depart with his troops without delay, and join under the walls of Jerusalem the main army of Godfrey, who had just begun the seige of the Holy City.

Immediately the trumphets were sounded in Marhala; the cohorts formed themselves; and the army of the Prince of Taranto leaving a garrison behind in the Saracen city, set out on the march for Jerusalem, singing that now well-known refrain of the Crusaders, which was re-echoed in chorus by the mob that followed in the wake of the army:

[2] Baudry, Archbishop of Dole, says: "It was not imputed a crime to eat up the Saracens; it was considered to be a waging of war against them with the teeth."

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! City of marvels! Happiest among all cities! You are the object of the vows of the angels! You constitute their happiness! The wood of the cross is our standard. Let's follow that banner, that marches on before, guided by the Holy Ghost! God wills it! God wills it! God wills it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

Fergan left the city with wife and child clad in new raiment, thanks to the purse he had found in the desert. An ass carried their provisions—a large pouch of water and a bag of dates. He also took precautions of arming himself for defence against marauders. To drop out of the stream of the Crusaders would at that season have been insanity. After the capture of Jerusalem, large numbers of Crusaders were expected to return to Europe, taking ship at Tripoli on Genoese or Venetian vessels. Fergan's little treasure would enable him to pay for the passage of himself and family to either of those cities, whence he planned to cross Italy, return to Gaul and settle down at Laon in Picardy, where he confidently expected to find Gildas, the elder brother of Bezenecq the Rich and joint descendant with the quarryman of Joel, the ancient Gallic Chief. Fergan felt a lively desire to see Jerusalem, the city where, over a thousand years before, his ancestress Genevieve had witnessed the agony of the carpenter of Nazareth, that humble artisan, that great and kindly sage, the friend of the slaves, of the poor and of the afflicted, the enemy of hypocrite priests, of the rich and of the powerful of his days. Joan and Colombaik alternately rode the ass when they were tired. The serf experienced a rare pleasure at seeing for the first time his wife and child properly clad, and steadily regaining the strength they had lost by their recent fatigues and privations.

They followed the wake of the army. At its head marched a band of cavaliers carrying the banner of St. Peter, the disciple of Jesus. Behind Peter's banner came the train-bands under the command of their respective seigneurs, carrying the banner

of each seigniory embroidered with coat-of-arms, or war cries, such as: "To Christ, the Victorious!" "To the Reign of Jesus!" The latter motto appeared on the standard of the Prince of Taranto. The legate of the Pope followed next, accompanied by the clergy; then the troops of soldiers, on foot and on horseback; and finally the multitude of ragged men, women and children who trailed after the army. Fergan journeyed with these. To the end of husbanding their little purse, he employed himself taking charge of the mules or guiding the wagons, for which he received a few deniers and his food. The journey from Marhala to Jerusalem was trying in the extreme. A large number of helpless people dropped out on the route and died of thirst, hunger and fatigue, and became the pray of hyenas and vultures. Thus their bleaching bones, together with those of so many other victims, traced also the route to Jerusalem. Half a day's journey from the city Colombaik came near dying. Thrown down by a horse, his leg was broken in two places. As the child suffered excruciating pains he could not be transported on the ass. Leaving the other stragglers to continue their march, Fergan was left behind with Colombaik and Joan. The soil at that place was arid and mountainous. The pain suffered by Colombaik was intolerable. Hoping to descry some habitation, Fergan climbed to the top of a palm tree. At a great distance off the road nestled a collection of peasant houses at the foot of a hill, hidden under clusters of date trees. Aware of the kind-heartedness natural to the Saracen people, whom nothing but the ferocity of the Crusaders pushed to a desperate resistance, above all aware of the religious regard that this nation has for the laws of hospitality, Fergan decided to transport his son with the aid of Joan to one of those houses and ask for help. The decision was put with all the greater promptness into execution out of fear for the marauders and vagabonds, who, hovering at a distance, would have slain them for the booty.

The dwellers of the little hamlet had all fled at the approach of the army of the Crusaders, except one Arab and his wife.

Both of them, bent with age and seated at the threshold of their house, held their beads in their hands and were praying, in calm resignation awaiting death, certain that some soldier or other of Christ would come and pillage and ravage their home. The old Saracen and his mate, seeing Joan and Fergan approach carrying in their arms the child, who moaned piteously, realized that they need not fear them as enemies, and hastened forward to their encounter. Ignorant of the language of the travelers as these were of theirs, the Saracen couple exchanged a few words among themselves, pointing sympathetically to the child, and while the woman went towards a little garden, the man motioned to Fergan and Joan to follow him into the house. This dwelling was whitewashed without, after the fashion of the country; it was crowned by a terrace, and had no other opening than a narrow door. Two mats served for beds. After motioning Fergan and Joan to lay the child upon one of these and then to bare his leg, the host, who seemed gifted with certain surgical abilities, lengthily examined Colombaik's leg. He then stepped out, making a sign for Fergan and his wife to wait for him.

"Oh, Fergan!" exclaimed Joan, kneeling beside Colombaik, "with what solicitude did not that Saracen and his wife look upon our child! And yet we are strangers to them, enemies. The Crusaders whom we follow, ravage their country, massacre them, torture them to death! And yet see with what kindness these worthy people receive us!"

"It is natural. The Mohamedan priests, while preaching the sacred love of country and resistance to foreign oppression, also preach the holy laws of humanity towards God's creatures of whatever faith. Alack! Certain Christian priests order, and themselves set the example of, the extermination of those who do not share their beliefs. An atrocious creed!"

The Arab returned with his wife. She carried in her hand a vase of water, some palm leaves just pulled off, and some herbs that she had pounded between two stones. The Saracen brought several splints of the length of Colombaik's leg, together with

a long bandage of cloth, with the aid of which she bound the splints firmly around the child's leg, after having covered it with the crushed herbs. The leg being bandaged, the old Arab woman sprinkled it with fresh water, and covered the whole limb with the palm leaves. Colombaik felt eased as if by enchantment. Full of gratitude, and unable to express themselves in a tongue that was not theirs, Fergan and Joan kissed the hands of their hosts. A tear rolled down upon the aged man's long beard, and he gravely pointed to heaven, meaning undoubtedly to tell his guests it was God that their thanks were due to. He then took the ass, which had remained standing at the door, and led it to the stable. The old woman brought in honey, fresh dates, sheep's milk and a buttered roll of meal. Fergan and Joan felt deeply touched by such a generous hospitality. Their child's sufferings were momentarily abating. The old man made them understand by a significant gesture, opening and closing his ten fingers three times and pointing to the child upon the mat, that he had to remain down thirty days, in order no doubt that the bones of his broken leg could again grow together and become strong. Thanks to the solitude where this house was ensconced in, the period necessary for the healing of the child ran peacefully by. They were the happiest days the serfs had yet known. After having exercised his hospitality towards them without knowing them, the aged Arabian grew attached to Fergan, Joan and Colombaik, touched by the gratitude that, to the best of their ability, they sought to manifest, and also by the tender affection that united Fergan and his wife. One day he took Fergan by the hand, led him up a stony hill, whence he pointed to the horizon, shaking his head expressive of uneasiness; he then pointed towards the foot of the hill at the tranquil habitation where they had dwelt nearly a month. Fergan understanding that he was urged to stay in that retreat, looked astonished at the Arabian. The latter thereupon folded his arms on his breast, closed his eyes, and, melancholily shaking his head, pointed to the earth, indicating that he was old, that

soon he and his wife would die, and that, if Fergan was so inclined, the house, the garden, and the little field attached to it, would be his.

Fergan was but a poor serf, led to the Crusade by the urgency of escaping with wife and child the vengeance of his seigneur and the horrors of serfdom. Nevertheless, at that supreme moment, yielding obedience to the orders left by the Gallic chief Joel to his descendants, he achieved an act of self-sacrifice before which men more fortunately situated than himself might have recoiled. He might have accepted the aged Arabian's offer and ended his days free and happy in this retreat, in the company of his wife and child. But he was the depositary of a portion of the chronicles and relics of his family. He knew that Gildas, the elder brother of Bezenecq the Rich, held the archives of their family back to the invasion of Gaul by Cæsar, while himself was charged with a latter portion of safe-keeping. Some day he hoped to be able, in obedience to the behest of Joel, to add to those chronicles the recital of his own and his family's ordeals during the terrible period of the feudal oppression, and, in his turn, narrate the events they witnessed during this Crusade, one of the momentous crimes of Rome. Accordingly, Fergan considered it a sacred duty to make every effort to return to Gaul, and join his relation Gildas the Tanner in Laon. Moreover, since his arrival in Syria, he had heard that the inhabitants of several large cities in Gaul, more enlightened and more daring than the poorer rustic plebs, were beginning to stir. He had heard accounts of the insurrection of several cities of Gaul against their seigneurs, bishops and abbots, masters of the places. Perchance, those bourgeois revolts might lead to revolts among the serfs of the field. He conceived as possible a general revolt against the hierarchy of Church, monarchy and seigneurs, and he considered it a crime not to strive to be in Gaul at that hour of uprising and general enfranchisement. Fergan declined the Arab's offer.

July 15, 1099, arrived. Forever indelibly fixed remained that fatal date upon the serf's mind. Towards noon, leaning upon

his mother and Fergan, Colombaik had been essaying his strength. For the first time in thirty days he had risen from his bed, and the two venerable hosts followed with tender solicitude the movements of the child. Suddenly the tramp of a horse was heard descending at a gallop the hill that rose above the house. The aged Saracen exchanged a few words with his wife and both stepped out precipitately. A few instants later they re-entered, accompanied by another grey-bearded Musselman covered with dust. His pale and disconcerted features expressed terror and despair. He spoke to the aged couple in abrupt words and panting for breath. Blood-stained bandages of linen around his right arm and leg betokened two recent wounds. Several times, in the midst of his excited words, the word "Jerusalem" was heard—the only word that the serfs could understand. As he spoke, fear, indignation and horror reflected themselves on the features of the aged Saracen and his wife, until presently their venerable faces were bathed in tears, and they fell upon their knees, moaning and raising their hands to heaven. At that moment the stranger, who in his pre-occupation had not noticed the serfs, recognized them by their clothes as Christians, emitted a cry of rage and drew his cimeter. Quickly rising to their feet, both the hosts ran to him, and after a few words, pronounced in a voice of tender reproach, the Saracen warrior returned his sabre to its scabbard and exchanged a few sentences with the aged couple. The latter seemed to conjure the stranger to remain with them; but he shook his head, pressed their hands in his, rushed out, threw himself upon his steaming horse, invoked the vengeance of heaven with a gesture, climbed the hill at a gallop, and vanished from sight. This friend of the aged couple had come to inform them of the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. The recital of the massacres, the pillage, the unspeakable atrocities that the soldiers of Christ had soiled and dishonored their victims with, threw the aged couple into consternation. Anxious to ascertain the fact, Fergan addressed them, uttering the word "Jerusalem" in a sad and interrogating

tone. Instead of answering, however, both drew brusquely away as if they extended to him the horror that the Crusaders inspired them with. Fergan exchanged a sad glance with Joan, when the host, no doubt regretting his first impulse, returned to the serfs, leaned over Colombaik, who had been laid down again, and kissed him on the forehead. Joan and Fergan, understanding the delicacy of the sentiment thus expressed, were moved to tears. The old Saracen took Fergan for one of the soldiers of that ferocious and impious Crusade, and deposited a kiss of pardon and oblivion upon the innocent brow of the child of the reputed malefactor. The aged Saracen then left the house with his wife.

"Jerusalem has fallen into the power of the Crusaders," Fergan said to Joan. "I can reach the city in a few hours. I desire to go there. There is nothing for me to fear. I shall be back early to-morrow morning. We shall then decide what to do."

Although uneasy at the prospect of his departure, the sweet Joan sought not to keep her husband back. After embracing her and entrusting to her his little treasury and the belt containing his family records and relics, Fergan left for Jerusalem. Hardly upon the road, which passed at quite a distance from his late retreat, he encountered a troop of pilgrims. They were also hastening to the holy city, whose domes, towers, minarets and even ramparts they began to perceive from afar after four hours march.

That vast city formed a square a league long. The enclosure dominated from the west by the high mount of Zion, contained the four rocky hills on which Jerusalem was built in an ampitheatre,—to the east, Mount Moriah, on which rose the Mosque of Omar, built upon the site of the old Temple of Solomon; to the southeast, Mount Acra, to the north, Mount Bezetha; and further to the west the Mount of Golgotha, the Calvary where the young man of Nazareth was crucified under the eyes of Fergan's ancestress Genevieve. At the summit of Calvary rose the Church

of the Resurrection, built on the very spot where Jesus died, a magnificent church until then religiously respected by the Saracens, together with its treasures, despite the war of the Crusaders. Within the church stood the sepulchre of Christ, the pretext for this unhallowed war. Such was the distant view of Jerusalem. As the travellers approached, they saw more distinctly, within the ramparts of walls, the outlines of ampitheaters of white square houses, surmounted with terraces, and here and yonder, standing out against the deep blue of the sky, the domes of mosques, the steeples of Christian basilicas, and several bouquets of palm trees. Not a tree was visible in the environs of the city. The reddish, stony and parched ground, radiated the torrid heat of the sun that was westerning behind the hills. In the neighborhood of the camp, whose tents glistened only a short distance from the ramparts, a large number of Crusaders were seen dead or dying of the wounds that they received at the sortie made by the besieged. The wounded filled the air with pitiful wails, vainly imploring help. All the men, not the able-bodied alone, but even those whose wounds allowed them to walk, had precipitated themselves upon the city, in order to share in the sack. The abandoned camp contained only corpses, the dying, horses and beasts of burden. As the travelers drew still nearer to the city, whose gates had been knocked in after the siege, a confused and formidable noise struck their ears. It was a frightful mixture of cries of terror, of rage and of desperate supplication, above which ever and anon rose the fanatical clamor: "God wills it! God wills it!" After staggering and stumbling over thousands of corpses, strewn near the approaches of the gate of Bezetha, Fergan arrived at the entrance of a long street that issued into a vast square, in the middle of which rose the marvelous Mosque of Omar on the very site where once stood the ancient Temple of Solomon. It was as if the serf had stepped into a river of blood, red and reeking, and carrying in its current thousands of mutilated corpses, heads and disjointed members.

The street that Fergan stepped into belonged to the new ward,

the richest of the city. Stately dwellings and not a few marble palaces, surmounted with balustraded terraces, rose on either side of this vast thoroughfare paved with wide slabs of stone. A furious multitude—soldiers, men, women and children, all belonging to the Crusade—swarmed over this long street, uttering ferocious yells. A young Saracen woman rushed out of the door of the third house to the right of Fergan. She was deadly pale with terror, her hair streamed behind her, and her rich clothes were in shreds. In her arms she carried two children, two or three years old. Behind her an aged man, already wounded, appeared on the threshold, walking backward and striving to defend her. The flow of blood covered his visage and clotted his long white beard, while he struggled to keep back two Crusaders. One of these, carrying on his left shoulder a bundle of costly clothes, pursued the aged Saracen with sword thrusts, and finally ran him through the breast, throwing him dead at the feet of the young mother. The second Crusader, who, no doubt disdaining to carry a heavy booty, had strung around his neck several gold chains pillaged in this house, immediately seized the young woman by the throat and rolled her over on a heap of corpses, while the first crushed under his iron-tagged heels the heads of the two children that had dropped from their mother's arms. At that instant, one of the women who followed the army hastened by, a hideous and savage-looking hag, brandishing in her hand the stump of a knife, red with blood. A lad, about the age of Colombaik, accompanied the fury. "Each one his turn," said she to the soldier; "leave for me those whelps of the devil, my son will despatch them!" And placing the knife in the lad's hand, she added: "Cut off their heads, disembowel those infidel dogs!" The child obeyed the hag's orders and disemboweled the two little children.

Further away, a band of vagabonds and wenches, drunk with wine and carnage, was besieging a palace that the men of Heracle, seigneur of Polignac, had seized. As the symbol of possession, these had raised the embroidered banner of their

seigneur upon the terrace of the splendid building. After throwing a shower of stones at the soldiers of the seigneur of Polignac, the vagabonds and wenches assailed the soldiers with sticks, pikes and cutlasses, shouting hoarsely in the midst of the bloody melee: "Death! To the sack! This house and its riches belong to us as well as to the seigneurs! To the sack! Death! Death!"

"Exterminate this band of vagabonds!" shouted back the soldiers, thrusting about them with their lances and swords. "Death to these jackals who mean to devour the prey of the lion!"

As Fergan advanced along this street he witnessed shocking scenes. The sight of a gigantic soldier carrying, strung on his upright lance, three little children from five to six months old, was a spectacle never to be forgotten. Suddenly he found himself shoved hither and thither, and presently shut in within a circle of armed men who seemed to be arranged in some kind of order before the entrance of one of the most splendid palaces on the street. Lemon and oleander trees, planted in boxes, but now broken in two and upset, still ornamented the moresque balustrades of the terrace. The band, among which there were several women, and that left a wide empty space free between itself and the walls, emitted yells of savage impatience. Presently, the sleeves of his brown frock rolled back to the elbows, and his hands red with blood, a monk leaned forward over the balustrade of the terrace. It was Peter the Hermit, the companion of Walter the Pennyless. The identical Cuckoo Peter, whose hollow eyes glistened with savage fanaticism, now called out to the crowd in a hoarse voice: "My brothers in Christ, are you ready? Draw near and receive your share of the booty."

"We are ready, holy man, and have been long waiting," answered several bandits; "we are losing our time here; they are pillaging elsewhere, holy father in God! We want our share of the booty."

"Here comes your share of this great feast, my brothers in Christ. The vapor of the infidels' blood rises towards the Lord

like an incense of myrrh and balsam! Let not one of the miscreants, that we are about to throw down to you from this terrace, escape with his life!"

Peter the Hermit vanished and almost immediately the bust of a Saracen, clad in the purple caftan embroidered in gold, appeared above. Although bound hands and feet, the wild jumps of the unhappy man showed that he resisted with all his might the efforts of those who strove to throw him down into the street. A few minutes later, however, half his body had been forced over the balustrade. He straightened up once more, but immediately was hurled into space and dropped, head foremost, thirty feet below. A joyous clamor broke out at the man's fall, and redoubled when, with a dull thud, his skull struck the pavement and broke. He lived a few seconds longer, and strove to turn on his side while emitting violent imprecations. But soon, riddled with sword thrusts, broken with clubs and mauled with stones, there remained of him but a mangled lump in the midst of a pool of blood. "Father in God," cried out the mob, "the job is done! Hurry up! Send us another!"

The hideous figure of Peter the Hermit re-appeared above the balustrade. He leaned his head forward and contemplated the remains of the Saracen. "Well done, my children!" The monk had hardly disappeared again, when two youths of fifteen to sixteen years, brothers no doubt, and bound face to face, were thrown down from the terrace. The violence of the fall snapped the bands that held them together. The elder was killed on the spot, the younger's legs were broken. For a few moments he dragged himself on his hands, moaning piteously and seeking to approach his brother's corpse. The Crusaders pounced upon these new victims. Women, monsters in human form, pulled out their entrails, indulged in obscene and infamous mutilations upon the two corpses, and throwing into the air the bleeding parts, cried out exultingly: "Let's exterminate the infidels! God wills it!"

Twenty times did Peter the Hermit re-appear on the terrace,

and twenty times were bodies thrown down over the balustrade, and torn to pieces by the crowd, drunk with bloodshed. Among these victims were five young girls and two other boys from ten to twelve years of age.

All the inhabitants of Jerusalem who were captured, even those who had paid ransom for their lives—men, women and children—all, to the number of seventy thousand human beings, were thus massacred. The extermination lasted two days and three nights, obedient to the following order of the seigneur Tancred, one of the heroes of the Crusade: *"We consider it necessary to put to the sword without delay both the prisoners and those who paid ransom."*

The last of the victims, cast at the mob by Peter the Hermit, were being massacred, when another band of Crusaders, running up from the other end of the street and marching towards the large square, passed by shouting: "The people of Tancred are pillaging the Mosque of Omar. * * * By all the saints of Paradise and all the devils of hell, we want our part of the booty!"

"And we stay here amusing ourselves with corpses!" cried out the butchers under Peter the Hermit's terrace. "Let's on to the mosque! To the sack! To the sack!"

Again Fergan was carried by the torrent of the crowd and arrived upon a spacious square littered with Saracen corpses, seeing that, after the assault had succeeded, the Saracens had retreated, fighting from street to street, and drawn themselves up before the mosque, where a last battle was delivered. At that place, these heroes were all killed defending the temple, the refuge of the women, the children and the old men, too feeble to fight, and who relied upon the pity and mercy of the vanquishers. Easier far had it been to excite the pity of a hungry tiger than that of the Crusaders.

Several tiers of marble stairs led down to the Mosque of Omar, whose floor was about three feet below the level of the street. Such had been the butchery indulged in by the Crusa-

ders, and so much blood had run down into the temple, which measured more than one thousand feet in circumference, that the blood, rising above the first stairs, began to run over into the square. The interior of the Mosque of Omar offered to the eye but one vast sheet of blood, still warm, and the vapor of which rose like a light mist above an innumerable mass of corpses, here wholly, yonder only partially submerged in the red lake, where heads and members hacked from the trunk with hatchets, were seen floating at large. Of the Crusaders who entered the Mosque of Omar for pillage, some waded in blood to their waists. The warmth of the flowing blood and the site of the shocking butchery made Fergan reel with dizziness. His heart thumped against his ribs and his strength gave way. In vain he sought support against one of the porphyry columns at the facade of the mosque. He dropped down unconscious, his legs steeped in blood.

Fergan knew not how long he remained in that condition. When he regained consciousness it was night. The brightness of a large number of torches struck his eye. Religious songs, repeated in chorus by thousands of voices, fell upon his ears. Flanked by two files of soldiers, who marched in measured tread with torches in their hands, he saw a long procession pass by the temple. The procession wended its way to the Mount of Golgotha, close to the Church of the Resurrection, where stood the sepulchre of Jesus. At the head of the procession triumphantly marched the legate of the Pope, Peter the Hermit and the clergy, chanting praises to the All-powerful; after them the chiefs of the Crusaders, among them William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, clad in an old sack and smiting his breast. These were followed by the train-bands of the seigneurs, together with a multitude of soldiers, men, women, children and pilgrims, singing in chorus *Laudate Creator.* The crowd was so numerous that when the prelates and the chiefs of the Crusade, who headed the procession, reached the front of the Church of the Resurrection, the last ranks were still crowding upon each other

in the middle of the square of the mosque. Other Crusaders marched outside of the two files of torch-bearing soldiers.

When Fergan approached the door of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, brilliantly lighted within, he heard loud roars of laughter mingled with maudlin imprecations. The King of the Vagabonds and his band, in company with their wenches, all drunk with wine and carnage, had taken possession of the holy place, and had begun to pillage it of its ornaments. At the center of the sanctuary stood Perrette the Ribald, her hair disheveled like a Bacchante's.

PART III.

THE COMMUNE OF LAON.

CHAPTER I.

THE RISE OF THE COMMUNES.

For centuries Laon had for its temporal seigneur the bishop of the diocese, and figured from the start among the foremost cities of Picardy. Since the Frankish conquest, and down to the date of the events here narrated (1112), Laon constituted a part of the special domains of the kings. Clovis made himself master of the city through the treason of Saint Remy, who baptized that crowned bandit at Rheims. Clovis' wife, Clotilde, founded in the city the collegiate church of Saint Peter, and later Brunhild built a palace there. A bishop of Laon, Adalberon, the paramour of Queen Imma, was her accomplice in the poisoning of Lothair, the father of Louis the Indolent,—a homocidal example that was soon imitated upon himself by his Queen, Blanche, another adulterous poisoner, who, through the murder committed by her, confirmed the usurpation of Hugh Capet, to the injury of the last Carlovingian king. Charles, Duke of Lorraine, the uncle of Louis the Indolent, having become through the latter's death the heritor of the crown of the Frankish kings, took possession of Laon. Hugh Capet beseiged him there, and, after several assaults, succeeded in capturing the city, thanks to the connections that Adalberon, the adulterer and poisoning bishop, had preserved in the place. Since then, Laon continued as a sovereign ecclesiastical seigniory, but always under the suzerainty of the French King. In the year 1112, the date of this narrative, the reigning king was named Louis the Lusty. As obese as, but much less indolent than his father, Philip I, the excommunicated lover of the handsome Berthrade who died in 1108, Louis the Lusty did not, like his father, submit to the

affronts and vexations of the feudal seigneurs; he waged war to the knife against them to the end of extending with their spoils his own domains, that then took in only Paris, Melun, Compiegne, Etampes, Orleans, Montlhery, Puiset and Corbeil. Thus, in addition to the scourge of the private wars among the seigneurs, the people bent under the affliction of the wars of the king against the seigneurs, and of the Normans against the king. The Normans, the descendants of old Rolf the Pirate, had conquered England under their duke William. But, although settled down in that ultramarine country, the Kings of England preserved in Gaul the duchy of Normandy and Gisors, and from thence dominated the territory of Vexin, almost to the gates of Paris, waging incessant war upon Louis the Lusty. Thus Gaul continued to be ravaged by bloody strifes, with none other than the people, the serfs and villeins, as the perpetual victims. The wretched agricultural plebs, decimated by the execrable craze of the Crusades, that held out despite the recapture of Jerusalem by the Turks, found itself crushed by a double burden, their decreased numbers being compelled by increased labor to provide for the needs, the prodigalities and the debaucheries of the clergy and the seigneurs.

The bourgeois and other townsmen, better organized, better able to realize their power, above all more enlightened than the serfs of the fields, had revolted in many cities against their lay or ecclesiastical seigneurs, and, by dint of daring, of energy and stubborness, had, at the price of their own blood, regained their freedom and secured the abolition of the degrading and shameful rights that the feudal families had been long enjoying. A small number of cities, even without resorting to arms, had, by virtue of great pecuniary sacrifices, purchased their enfranchisement from the seigniorial rights, with round sums of money. Delivered from their former secular and creed servitude, the city populations celebrated with enthusiasm all the circumstances connected with their emancipation. Thus, on April 15, 1112, the bourgeois merchants and artisans of the city of Laon were

in gala since early morning. From one side to the other of the streets, male and female neighbors called one another from their windows and exchanged gladsome salutations.

"Well, neighbor," said one, "the bright anniversary of the inauguration of our Commune Hall and belfry has arrived!"

"Do not mention it, neighbor; I have not slept all night! With my wife and children we were up till three o'clock in the morning burnishing up my iron casque and coat of mail. Our armed militia will add great luster to the ceremony. May God be praised for this great day!"

"And the procession of our artisans' guilds will be no less superb! Would you believe it, neighbor, that I, who during all my life of a carpenter have not, as you may imagine, ever held a needle in my hands, helped my wife to sew together the stripes of our new banner?"

"Thank God, the weather will be beautiful for the ceremony. Look how clear and brilliant the dawn is!"

"Couldn't be otherwise! Such a feast could not lack good weather. I expect that when I shall hear for the first time the peals from our communal belfry every clank will make my heart bound!"

These dialogues and many others, naive testimony of the joy of the inhabitants of Laon, took place along the length of all the streets from house to house, from the humblest to the richest. Almost all the windows, opened since the break of day, exposed to view the laughing faces of men, women and children, all actively engaged with preparations for the festivities.

The gladsome stir in almost all the quarters of the city, rendered all the more striking the gloomy and sombre and, so to say, sullen aspect of a certain number of dwellings of ancient architecture, and whose gates were, as a rule, flanked by two turrets with pointed roofs, surmounted with a weather-vane. Not a chink of these dwellings, blackish with age, was open on this morning. They belonged to the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the metropolitan church, or to noble knights, who, not owning

estates large enough to live in the country, inhabited the cities, and ever sided against the bourgeois and with the lay or ecclesiastical seigneur. Accordingly, in Laon, these clergymen and knights were designated as the *episcopals,* while the inhabitants, who, according to the language of the day, "took the oath of the Commune," were called the *communiers.* The antique turrets of the dwellings of the episcopals were at once a species of fortification and a symbol of the nobility of their origin. On that morning, these dwellings, silent and shut up, seemed to denote the displeasure given to the noble episcopals by the rejoicings of the Laonese laboring classes.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHARTER OF LAON.

But there were other dwellings, also flanked with turrets, besides those of the nobles. These others were gaily decorated, and the whiteness of their masonry, contrasting with the aspect of the ancient architecture of the nobles, to which they seemed to be annexes, bespoke a more recent date.

One of these establishments, thus fortified only a short time since, lay at the corner of Exchange street, the leading mercantile thoroughfare of the city. The old door, whose threshold and lintels were of stone, and at either side of which rose two white and high turrets recently built, had been thrown open at the very first break of day, and several townsmen were seen going in and out. They came for certain instructions on the ceremonies. In one of the chambers of this dwelling sat Fergan and Joan the Hunchback. It was about twelve years since they had left the Holy Land. The hair and beard of Fergan, now over forty years of age, began to betray streaks of gray. He was no longer the serf of olden days—restless, savage, tattered. His features breathed happiness and serenity. Equipped almost wholly as a soldier, he wore a jacket of iron mail and a corselet of steel. He was seated near a table at which he wrote. Joan, clad in a robe of brown wool, and wearing on her head a sober bonnet, from under which a long white veil fell upon her shoulders, looked no less blissful than her husband. On the sweet face of this brave mother, once so severely tried, the expression of profound felicity was depicted. At the request of Fergan she had just drawn from an old oaken cabinet a little iron casket, which she placed upon the table where Fergan was writing. The

casket, an inheritance from Gildas the Tanner, contained several parchment scrolls, yellow with the age of centuries, besides the several relics so dear to the family of the Gallic chief Joel, and among which was the silver cross of Genevieve, together with the pilgrim's shell that Fergan had taken from Neroweg VI in the desert of Syria. Fergan had just finished transcribing on a parchment a copy of the communal charter, under which, for the last three years, the city of Laon was free and led a peaceful and flourishing existence. The quarryman wished to join the copy of that charter to the archives of the family of Joel, as a witness of the awakening spirit of freedom of his own days, and of the inexorable resolution of the people to battle against the kings, the clergymen and the seigneurs, descendants or heritors of the Frankish conquest. For the last fifteen or twenty years back, other cities besides Laon, driven to extremities by the horrors of feudalism, had, some through insurrection, others through great sacrifices of money, obtained similar charters, under shelter of which they governed themselves like republics, similar to the heroic and brilliant days of Gaul's independence, centuries before the invasions of the Romans. The copy of the communal charter of Laon, the original of which, deposited in the Mayor's office, bore the name and signature of Gaudry, bishop of the diocese of Laon, and of Louis the Lusty, King of the French, ran as follows:

CHARTER OF THE COMMUNE OF LAON.

I.

All men, domiciled within the walls of the city and in its suburbs, belonging to any seigneur who holds as a fief the territory which they inhabit, shall swear allegiance to this Commune.

II.

Throughout the full extent of the city each shall render assistance to the other, loyally and to the best of his ability.

III.

The men of this Commune shall be free holders of their goods. *Neither the King, nor the Bishop, nor any other, shall be entitled to make any levy upon them,* except by the judgment of their own town council.

IV.

Each shall, on all occasions, observe fidelity towards those who shall have taken the oath of the Commune, and shall aid them with deed and advice.

V.

Within the limits of the Commune, all the men shall mutually help one another, according to their power; and they shall in no wise, whatever it be, suffer the seigneur, Bishop or any other, to distrain any property from them, or compel them to pay imposts.

VI.

Thirteen *Councilmen* shall be elected by the Commune. One of these councilmen shall be elected *Mayor* by the suffrage of all those who shall have taken the oath of the Commune.

VII.

The Mayor and the Councilmen shall make oath to favor no person by reason of friendship, and to render an equitable decision in all matters, according to their powers; all others shall take the oath of obedience and to sustain with arms the decisions of the Mayor and Councilmen. When the bell of the belfry shall sound to assemble the Commune, anyone who does not attend shall pay a fine of twelve sous.

VIII.

If anyone injure a man who shall have taken the oath of the Commune of Laon, a complaint being lodged with the Mayor and Councilmen, they shall, after due trial, enforce justice upon the body and property of the guilty party.

IX.

If the guilty party takes refuge in a fortified castle, the Mayor and Councilmen shall notify the seigneur of the castle, or his lieutenant. If in their opinion satisfaction shall have been rendered against the guilty party, that will suffice; but if the seigneur refuses satisfaction, *they shall themselves enforce justice upon the property and upon the men of said seigneur.*

X.

If any member of the Commune shall have entrusted his money to some one of the city, and he to whom the money has been so entrusted takes refuge in some strong castle, the seigneur having been notified, shall either return the money, or drive the debtor from his castle. If the seigneur does neither, justice shall be enforced upon his goods and his men.

XI.

Whenever the Mayor and the Councilmen shall desire to fortify the city, they shall be free to do so on whatever seigneur's territory it may be.

XII.

The men of the Commune shall be free to grind their corn, and bake their bread wherever they please.

XIII.

If the Mayor and Councilmen of the Commune require money for the use of the city, and raise a tax, they may levy the same on the inheritances and property of the townsmen, and on the sales and profits made in the city.

XIV.

No stranger, a copy-holder of any Church or seigneur, and established *outside of the city and its suburbs*, shall be included in the Commune without the consent of his seigneur.

XV.

Whosoever shall be received in this Commune shall build a house within the space of one year, or shall purchase vineyards, or shall bring into the city moveable property, to the end that justice may be enforced, should a complaint be raised against him.

XVI.

If anyone slander the Mayor in the exercise of his functions, the slanderer's house shall be demolished, or he shall pay ransom for the same, or he shall deliver himself to the mercy of the Councilmen.

XVII.

No one shall molest or vex the strangers of the Commune. If any dare do so, he shall be deemed a violator of the Commune, and justice shall be enforced upon his person and his property.

XVIII.

Whosoever shall have wounded with arms any one who, like himself, shall have taken the oath of the Commune, then, unless he justifies his act under oath or with witnesses, he shall lose his hand, and shall pay nine livres; six for the fortifications of the city and of the Commune, three for the ransom of his hand. If he is unable to pay, he shall leave his hand at the mercy of the Commune.

Fergan had just finished transcribing the charter, when the door of his room opened. Colombaik stepped in. A young and comely wife of eighteen years at the most accompanied him. The son of the quarryman, a fine strapping young man of twenty-two, united in the expression of his face the sweetness of his mother and the energy of his father. Like the latter, he also was clad half townsman half soldier. His casque of black steel, ribbed with shining iron, imparted a martial air to his pleasing and open countenance. He carried a heavy cross-bow on his shoulder. From his right side hung a leather hostler that held the bolts needed for his weapon. His wife, Martine,

only daughter of the old age of Gildas, the elder brother of Bezenecq the Rich, was of the age and endowed with the charms of Isoline, a victim like her father of the cupidity of Neroweg VI.

"Father!" Colombaik cried out joyfully upon entering the room and alluding to his war-like outfit, "in your quality of constable of our bourgeois and artisan militia, do you find me worthy of figuring in the troop? Does Colombaik, the soldier, make you forget by his martial outfit Colombaik, the townsman and tanner?"

"Thank heaven, Colombaik the soldier will not, I hope, have occasion to blot out Colombaik the tanner," put in Joan with her sweet smile, "any more than Fergan the constable will have occasion to blot out Fergan the master quarryman. You will both continue to battle, you with your beaters against the hides in the tannery, your father with his pick against the stones of his quarry. Is not that your hope and desire, dear Martine?" Joan added, turning to the wife of her son.

"Certainly, my good mother," responded Martine. "Fortunately they are far behind, those evil days when the bourgeois and artisans of Laon, in order to escape the exactions of the bishop, of the clergymen, and of the knights, often had to barricade themselves in their houses and sustain a regular siege; and when, but too often, despite their resistance, their houses were entered and they were carried to the episcopal palace, where they were tortured for ransom. What a difference, my God, since we have been living under the Commune! We now are so free, so happy!" But Martine added with a sigh: "Oh, I regret that my poor father did not live to witness the change! His last moments would not have been saddened by the uneasiness that our future gave him. Seeing the terrible acts of violence indulged in by Bishop Gaudry, together with the nobles, against the inhabitants of Laon, acts that might any day have reached us as they reached so many others among our neighbors, my father always had before him the frightful fate of my uncle Bezenecq and his poor daughter Isoline!"

"Be at ease, my dear wife," rejoined Colombaik; "those accursed days shall not return! No, no! To-day old Gaul bristles with free Communes, as three hundred years ago it bristled with feudal castles. The Communes are our fortresses! Our belfry tower is our donjon. We no longer have to fear the seigneurs!"

"Ah, Martine, my sweet child," said Joan with deep emotion to the wife of her son, "happier than we, you happy youngsters will not see your children and your husbands enduring the horrors of servitude."

"Yes, we, the bourgeois and artisans of the cities are emancipated," Fergan rejoined pensively; "but serfdom presses as cruelly now as in the past upon the serfs of the fields. I fought, for that reason, with all my power, the clause in our charter that excludes from the Commune the serfs living outside of the village, or those who do not possess money enough to build a house here. Is it not to exclude them, when the consent of their seigneurs, or a sufficient sum with which to build a house in the city is required from them, who own not even their own arms? And yet, that sole wealth of the industrious man is equal to any other." Turning then to Martine: "Oh, the father of your father and of Bezenecq spoke like a whole-souled and wise man when, years ago, while vainly inciting the townsmen to the insurrections that are to-day breaking out in so many cities of Gaul, he aimed, not at the revolt of the bourgeois and artisans merely, but also at that of the serfs. Serfs and bourgeois united would not be long in crushing the seigniories. But reduced to its own forces, the task of the bourgeoisie will be long and arduous. . . We must be prepared for fresh struggles. . ."

"And yet, father," interposed Colombaik, "since the day when, in consideration of a good round sum, the bishop renounced his seigniorial rights and sold us our freedom for cash, has he ever dared to ride the high horse against us,—he, that brutal Norman warrior, who, before the establishment of the Commune, had the eyes of townsmen put out and often killed them for the mere offense of having condemned his acts of shameful debauchery,—

he, who in his own cathedral, only four years ago, killed with his own hands the unhappy Bernard des Bruyeres? No. no; despite his wickedness, Bishop Gaudry knows full well that, if, after pocketing our money as a consideration for giving his consent to our Commune, he were to try to return to his former practices, he would pay dear for his perjury. Three years of freedom have taught us to prize the sacred boon. We would know how to defend it, arms in hand, like the Communes of Cambrai, Amiens, Abbeville, Noyon, Beauvais, Rheims, and so many others."

"For all that, Colombaik," remarked Martine, "I cannot help trembling when I see Black John, that African giant, who once was the bishop's hangman, cross the streets of our city. That negro seems ever to be plotting some act of cruelty, like some savage beast, that but waits for some opportune moment to snap his chain."

"Be at ease, Martine," Colombaik answered with a smile. "The chain is solid, no less solid than that which holds that other bandit, Thiegaud, the serf of the Abbey of St. Vincent, and favorite of Bishop Gaudry, who familiarly calls him his friend 'Ysengrin,' a name given by children to the companion of the wolf. But, would you believe it, mother, that Thiegaud, a fellow stained with all imaginable crimes, that abominable reprobate, yet adores his daughter."

"Even the wild beasts love their young ones," answered Joan. "Did not Worse than a Wolf, our former seigneur, with whom your father fought when we were in Palestine, weep when he thought of his son?"

"That's true, mother; and so it is with this other wolf Thiegaud. The tenant of the little farm that your father left us, my dear Martine, was telling me yesterday that a short time ago Thiegaud's daughter came near dying, and he was almost crazed with grief. Moreover the wretch is as jealous of the chastity of his daughter as if he himself had led a clean life! The scamp tried to rob us, I am sure. When our tenant mentioned Thie-

gaud's name to me it was because the fellow pretended to want to buy in the name of the bishop, who is a passionate hunter, as you know, a young colt raised on our meadow."

"Take care!" said Fergan warningly. "The bishop is over head and ears in debt. If you sell the horse you will receive no money."

"I know the fine sire! I told our tenant: 'If Thiegaud pays cash for the horse, sell it to him; if not, don't.' The days are gone by when the seigneurs had the right to buy on credit, which is to say, the right to buy without ever paying. To try and compel them to pay was tantamount to placing liberty and even life in jeopardy. To-day, however, if the bishop should dare rob a communier, the Commune would enforce justice upon the episcopals, whether they willed it or not. That's the text of our charter, signed, not by the bishop only, but also by King Louis the Lusty—a signature, 'tis true, that we paid dearly for."

"We paid for it through the nose," rejoined Fergan. "That gross king chaffered and haggled for two days on a stretch. Our friend Robert the Eater was one of the communiers sent to Paris three years ago to secure our charter. What a gang of cut-throats make up that court! To start with, it was necessary to generously oil the palms of the royal councilors in order to dispose them in our favor. Louis the Lusty then wanted to have the proposed sum increased by a fourth, then by a third. Finally, over and above the redemption of his ancient rights of quarters and stabling for himself and his army, whenever he visited the city, he demanded the annual use of three houses, and if he did not avail himself of them, an equivalent of twenty livres a year, and three years in advance. You must admit, my children, that it is selling rather dear those 'rights of crown,' as they call them, monstrous rights, born of the iniquitous and bloody deeds of the conquest."

"So it is, father," answered Colombaik; "we may well say that, in selling to us for their weight in silver, what they please to call their rights, the king and his seigneurs act like highway-

men, who put the dagger to your throat and say: 'I robbed you yesterday; now give me your purse, and I shall not rob you to-morrow.' "

"It is better to yield your money than your blood," said Joan. "By dint of work and privation one may recover his savings, and one is at least freed from those fearful savages, whom I cannot think of without shuddering."

"Moreover, father," put in Martine, "it seems to me we need all the less fear the return of the tyranny of the seigneur, seeing that the king hates them as much as we, and fights them to the knife. We hear every day of his wars against the large vassals, of the battles he fights with them, and of the provinces he plucks them of."

"But, children, who profits by war? Who is it that pays the piper for the ravages it causes? The people. Yes, the King hates the seigneurs because from century to century they seized upon a large number of provinces, that one time belonged to the Frankish crown when it conquered Gaul. Yes, the King fights the seigneurs to the knife, but likewise does the butcher wage relentless war against the wolves who devour the cattle intended for the shambles. That's the reason of the hatred of Louis the Lusty and the prelates towards the lay seigneurs. Church and royalty desire to annihilate the seigneurs in order themselves to lead at will the plebs cattle, bequeathed to them by the conquest. Oh, my children, my heart is full of hope. But so long as serfs, artisans and bourgeois shall not stand united against their hereditary enemies, the future looms up before me big with new perils. Happier than our forefathers, we have initiated a holy struggle, our children will have to continue it through centuries to come."

"And yet, father, are we not now living in absolute peace and prosperity, free from crushing imposts, governed by magistrates of our own choice, who have no object other than the public weal? Our city becomes daily more industrious and affluent. The bishop and his episcopals can not be hair-brained

enough to seek to restore old conditions and assail our liberty. We have weapons wherewith to defend ourselves!"

"My child, if we wish to preserve our franchises, we must redouble our vigilance and energy, and keep ourselves ever ready for the fray."

"Why pre-occupy ourselves so much about the future, father? Why should we have to redouble our vigilance?"

"Bishop Gaudry and the nobles of the city used to subject us, at their will and without mercy, to crushing imposts and hateful rights. We said to them: 'Renounce forever your rights and your annual taxes; emancipate us; subscribe to our Commune; we shall give you a considerable sum in full future payment.' Now, then, these idle people, wasteful and covetous, thought only of the present and accepted our offer. By this time, however, the money has been spent, or there is little of it left. They are regretting that, in the language of the story, they killed the goose that lay the golden eggs. They are seeking to break the contract."

"What!" cried out Colombaik. "They would contemplate breaking the pact that they freely entered into—"

"Listen to me," interposed Joan. "I do not wish to exaggerate the apprehensions of your father for the future. Nevertheless, I believe to have noticed—" but breaking off she continued: "After all, I may have been mistaken—"

"What have you in mind, mother?"

"Can it be that you have not noticed that for some time back the knights, the city clergy, in short, all the folks of the party of the bishop, whom they call the episcopals, have been deporting themselves with a swaggering air towarls the townsmen and artisans in the streets?"

"You are right, Joan," remarked Fergan pensively. "I have been struck, less, perhaps, by the swagger of the episcopals, than by the insolence of their menials. It is a grave symptom, an indication of their resentment."

"Good! A ridiculous rancor, and nothing else!" said Colombaik smiling disdainfully. "Those holy canons and their noble pursuivants do not forgive the bourgeois for being free like themselves, and for having, like themselves, and when they please, turrets to their houses—a pleasure that I have bestowed upon myself, thanks to the finest stones of your quarry, father. Thus, our tannery could now sustain a siege against those ill-tempered episcopals. Besides, I have contrived for Martine a pretty little alcove in one of the turrets, and her initials, cut by me in copper, glisten in the weather-vane from the top of our turrets, just as the initials of a lady of rank."

"It will, no doubt, be more than ever well to have a strong house." observed Fergan. "It is not the weather-vanes on our turrets, but thick walls that trouble the episcopals."

"They will have to become accustomed to our strong houses. If not, by heaven—"

"No passion, Colombaik," put in the benign Joan, again interrupting the impetuous young man. "Your father has made the same observation that I did; and since the retainers of the knights look provoking, their masters must be near becoming so themselves. This morning's ceremony will surely, for more reasons than one, attract a large number of episcopals along the line of the procession. For heaven's sake, my child, no rashness!"

"Do not alarm yourself, Joan," rejoined Fergan, "we are too conscious of our good rights and of the strength of the Commune, not to keep cool in sight of mere insolence. But prudence does not exclude firmness."

Hardly had the quarryman pronounced these words when the door flew open, and a young and attractive woman entered with a pert air. She was a brunette, sprightly and handsomely dressed, like the rich bourgeois that she was. An orange-colored silk petticoat was fastened to her exquisite waist with a silver belt; her skirt, made of fine Arras cloth and bordered with marten fur, hardly reached her knees; on her black hair,

that shone like jet, she wore a bonnet, red like her stockings, which set off her well-shaped calves; finally, her feet were shod in smart shoes of shining Morocco leather. Simonne, that was her name, was the wife of Ancel Quatre-Mains, a master baker, renowned throughout the city of Laon and even the suburbs, for the excellence of his bread, his cream tarts, his honey cakes, his almond wafers and other dainties that were confectioned in his shop. He also drove the trade of flour merchant, and the Commune had chosen him one of its Councilmen. Ancel Quatre-Mains[1]—the name was due to his prodigious quickness in kneading the dough—presented a singular contrast to his wife,—as calm and thoughtful as she was pert and giddy-headed, as chary of words as she was loquacious, as corpulent as she was lithesome. His physiognomy betokened imperturbable good-nature, coupled in his instance with a lively sense of justice, a generous heart, and extraordinary skill at his trade.

Wishing to please his pretty wife, whom he loved as much as he was loved by her, the master baker had harnessed himself in war accoutrements. A large number of townsmen, until then deprived of the right to carry arms—a right exclusively reserved to the seigneurs, the knights and their pursuivants—found a pleasure and a triumph in such martial arrays. Ancel Quatre-Mains only slightly shared their taste; but in order to suit Simonne, who was greatly captivated by the military garb, he had put on a gobison, a species of strongly bolstered and thick leather corselet, that, not having been measured for him, pressed in his chest and caused his prominent stomach to protrude still more. On the other hand, his iron casque, much too large for him, kept falling over his eyes, an inconvenience that the worthy baker corrected from time to time by pushing his unlucky headgear to the back of his head. At times his legs also got entangled with the long sword that swung from a buff shoulder-belt, embroidered with red silk and silver thread by Simonne herself, who wished to imitate the tokens of approval bestowed by the noble ladies

[1] Four-handed.

upon their gallant knights. Ancel had long been the friend of Fergan, who loved and esteemed him greatly. Simonne, brought up with Martine and slightly her senior, cherished her like a sister. Thanks to their close neighborhood, the two young women visited each other every day after the routine of their household and even trade duties had been attended to, because, if Martine helped Colombaik in several departments of his tannery, Simonne, who was no less industrious than lovable, leaving to Ancel and his two apprentices the care of preparing the bread, would confection with her own pretty hands, as white as the wheat flour that they handled, the delicious cakes that the townsmen and even the noble episcopals were so fond of.

Simonne stepped in the house of her neighbor with her habitual pertness. But her charming face, no longer smiling and happy as usual, was now expressive of lively indignation, and entering a few steps ahead of her husband, she cried out: "The insolent wretch! As true as Ancel is called Quatre-Mains, I would have wished, 'pon the word of a Picardian woman, that I had four hands to slap her face, noble dame though she be! The old hag, as ugly as she is wicked and quarrelsome!"

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Fergan smiling, knowing well the nature of Simonne, "you, ordinarily so gay and full of laughter! You seem highly incensed, neighbor!"

"What has happened, Simonne? Who has excited your anger to such a pitch?" added Martine.

"Trifles," said the baker, shaking his head and answering the questioning looks of Fergan, Joan and Colombaik; "it is nothing, good neighbors."

"How so? . . Nothing!" cried out Simonne, turning with a start to her husband. "Oh! According to you such insolence must pass unperceived!"

The baker again shook his head, and, profiting by the opportunity to be rid of his casque, that pressed him heavily, he placed it under his arm. "Oh! It is nothing!" proceeded Si-

monne, now addressing Fergan and Joan. "I take you for judges. You are wise and thoughtful people."

"And what are we two, Martine and I?" queried Colombaik, laughing merrily. "So, then, you discard us?"

"I do not take you for judges, neither you nor Martine, because you would be too much of my opinion," replied Simonne; "Master Fergan and his wife are not, as far as I know, suspected of being hot-heads! Let them decide whether I am angry at nothing," she said, shooting a fresh look of indignation at the baker, who, greatly incommoded by his long sword, had sat down, placing it across his knees after laying his casque on the floor. "This is what happened," Simonne proceeded: "Agreeable to the promise I yesterday made to Martine of coming for her this morning to assist at the inauguration of our belfry, Ancel and I left the house early. Going up Exchange street we passed before the window of the fortified house of Arnulf, a nobleman of Haut-Pourcin, as he styles himself."

"I know the seigneur of Haut-Pourcin," observed Colombaik; "he is one of the bitterest episcopals in town."

"And his wife is one of the most brazen she-devils that ever joined a caterwauling!" cried out Simonne. "Judge for yourselves, neighbors. She and her maid were standing at one of the lower windows when Ancel and I went by. 'Look at her,' she said in a loud voice to her maid, laughing obstreperously; 'look at the baker's wife, how she struts in new clothes with her petticoat of Lombard silk, silver belt and skirt bordered with marten fur! May God pardon me! To see such creatures daring to put on silk and rich furs like us noble ladies, instead of humbly keeping to a petticoat of linsey-woolsey and a skirt hemmed with cat's skin, the proper clothing for the base station in life of these villeins! What a pity! Fortunately her yellow dress is of the color of her pastry and her bannocks! It will serve them for ensign!'"

"That's only in favor of the excellent baking of Simonne's

cakes, no so, neighbors?" put in the baker, "because, when the bannock comes out of the oven, it should be yellow as gold."

"See what a fool I am! I failed to take the words of the noble woman for a compliment!" Simonne resumed, saying: "But I answered her insolence plump and plain: 'The word of a Picardian woman, upon it, Dame Haut-Pourcin, if my petticoat is the ensign of my bannocks, your face is the ensign of your fifty years, despite all your cosmetics, and all your affectations of youth, of maidenhood and of freshness!'"

"Oh!" Colombaik broke out laughing. "An excellent answer to the old fairy, who, indeed, is always dressing like a young girl. There you have the nobility! The pretty dresses of our women trouble them as much as the turrets of our houses. Let them split with rage!"

"My answer struck home," proceeded Simonne. "The dame of Haut-Pourcin shook like a fury at the bars of her window, yelling: 'You street-walker! . . . You gallows-bird! . . . To dare to talk that way to me! . . . You vile emancipated serf! . . . But patience! . . . Patience! . . I shall soon have you cow-hided by my servants!'"

"'Oh, oh! As to that,' I answered her, 'do not talk nonsense, Dame Haut-Pourcin,'" put in the baker; "'the days are gone by when the noble dames had the woman of the bourgeois beaten!'"

"Yes," added Simonne with indignation, "and do you know what that harpy replied, while shaking her fist at Ancel? 'Off with you,' said she, 'you lumbering churl! The vile bourgeoisie will not much longer talk so big! Soon we will no longer see clowns wearing the casques of knights, and jades like your wife, wearing silk petticoats paid for by their paramours,'" saying which, Simonne, whose anger had until then been shaded with frolicsome animation, became purple with confusion. Two tears rolled down her large black ayes, and she added in a moved voice: "Such an outrage . . . to me . . . And Ancel says that's nothing! Such an outrage exasperates me!"

"Come now, be cool. Are you not as honorable a woman as

you are an industrious housekeeper?" said the baker affectionately approaching Simonne, who was wiping off her tears with the back of her hand. "That stupid insult cannot touch you, my dear, and does not even deserve to be remembered."

"Ancel is right," said Fergan. "That old woman is gone crazy. Crazy people's words do not count. But, friends, there is this about it. We must recognize that the insolence of the episcopals increases from day to day. Those allusions to former times foreshadow an evil intent on their part. It is well to be forewarned."

"What, father, will those people be so badly advised as to think of attacking our Commune? Is their insolence to be taken notice of? Will it be necessary for us to place ourselves on our guard against their evil designs?"

"Yeast that ferments is always sour, my child," replied the baker, reclining his head pensively. "The remark of your father is just. The provocations of the episcopals have a secret cause. I was just saying to Simonne: 'It is nothing!' I now say: 'It is something!'"

"Very well! Let it be so! Let them dare!" cried out Colombaik. "We are ready for those noblemen and clergymen, for all the tonsured fraternity and their bishop to boot!"

"And if the women take a part, as at the insurrection of Beauvais," exclaimed Simonne, clenching her little fists, "I, who have no children, shall accompany my husband to battle, and the dame of Haut-Pourcin will pay dear for her insults. 'Pon the word of a Picardian woman, I shall slap her insolent face as dry as an Easter wafer!"

The good baker was smiling at the heroic enthusiasm of his pretty wife when the peel of a large bell was heard from a distance. Fergan, his family and neighbors, listened to the sonorous and prolonged sound with a tremor of joy.

"Oh, my friends!" said Fergan with emotion, "do you hear it sound for the first time from the belfry of our Commune? Do

you hear it? To-day it summons us to a feast; to-morrow it will call us to the meeting of the council where we attend to the business of the city; some day it will give us the signal for battle. A belfry of the people! Your voice of bronze, at last awakening ancient Gaul from her slumber, has given the signal for the insurrection of the Communes!"

While the quarryman was speaking, all the bells of the churches of Laon began to chime in with the peals of the belfry. The deafening clanguor soon dominated and completely drowned the isolated tinkling of the communal bell. This rivalry of bell-ringing was no accident, nor yet a token of sympathy. It was an affront, premeditated by the bishop and his partisans. They realized the patriotic importance that the communiers of Laon attached to the inauguration of the symbol of their emancipation, and decided to mar the festivity.

"Oh, those friars! Always spiteful and hypocritic until the day when they deem themselves strong enough to be merciless!" exclaimed Colombaik. "Have your way, ye black-gowns! Ring at your loudest! The canting bells of your churches shall not silence our communal belfry! Your bells ring mankind to servitude, to imbecility, to the renunciation of their dignity; the belfry gathers them to fulfil their civic duties and to defend freedom! Come, father, come! The bourgeois militia must by this time be assembled around the pillars of the market-place. You are constable and I a captain-of-ten. Let's start. Do not let us be waited for. Liberty or death!"

CHAPTER III.

EPISCOPALS AND COMMUNIERS.

Fergan put on his casque, and presently giving his arm to Joan the Hunchback, as Colombaik gave his to Martine, and Quatre-Mains to his wife Simonne, the three couples sallied forth from Colombaik's tannery, followed by his apprentices, who, likewise were members of the Commune.

The rivalry of the bells continued undiminished. At intervals the bells of the churches intermitted their clangor, no doubt in the hope of having silenced the belfry. Its sonorous and regular peal proceeded, however, unchecked, and the clerical clangor was renewed with redoubled fury. The incident, puerile in seeming, but serious at bottom, produced a deep resentment towards the party of the nobles. It was a long distance from the tannery of Colombaik to the market-place, the rendezvous of the bourgeois militia. Large crowds blocked the streets, moving towards the communal Town Hall, that had been three years building and was recently finished. Only the casting and hanging of the bell in its campanile had retarded the inauguration of the monument so dear to the townsmen. More than once did Joan turn back to look, not without uneasiness, in the direction where her son followed with Martine, together with Quatre-Mains and Simonne. Joan's apprehensions were well founded. A large number of the domestics of the noble and clerical households were dispersed among the crowd, and from time to time hurled some vulgar insult at the communiers, upon which they would immediately take to their heels. Knights, clad in full armor, crossed and re-crossed the streets, their fists upon their hips, their visors up, and casting disdainful and defiant looks

upon the people. These provocations increased particularly in the vicinity of the rendezvous of the militia, at the head of which, and armed as if for battle, the Mayor of Laon and his twelve Councilmen were to march in procession to the Town Hall in order to inaugurate by a solemn session the meeting of these magistrates, held until then at the house of John Molrain, the Mayor.

The market-place of Laon, like that of all the cities of Gaul, consisted of large stalls, where, on Saturdays, occasionally also on other days of the week, the merchants, leaving their every-day shops, exposed their products for sale. Outsiders and the suburb population, who drew their supplies from Laon, thus found at one place all that they might want. But on that day the market served as the gathering place for a goodly number of bourgeois and artisans, who had armed themselves to join the procession and impart to it an imposing appearance. In case of war, every communier was obliged to furnish himself with a pike and an axe, or club, at the first call from the belfry, and hasten to the rendezvous. As a rule the crowd seemed indifferent to the insolent gibes and provocations of the episcopals. The communiers, at least a majority of them, felt themselves strong enough to despise the challenges to riot. A few, however, yielded to a certain sense of fear for the iron-clad nobles, who were accustomed to the use of weapons, and with whom the Laonese, who owed their enfranchisement to a contract and not to an insurrection, had not yet had occasion to measure themselves. Finally and moreover, hardly freed from their rude and base servitude, many of the townsmen still preserved, involuntarily, a certain habit, if not of respect, yet of dread for people whose cruel oppression they had so long been subject to. Shortly, the captains-of-tens, commanding squads of tens, and the captains-of-hundreds, commanding companies of hundreds, all under the command of Fergan, who had been chosen constable, or chief of the militia, drew up their ranks along the stalls of the market-

place. Colombaik was a captain-of-ten, his body was complete except for one lad called Bertrand, the son of Bernard des Bruyeres, a rich bourgeois who, three years previous, was assassinated in the cathedral by Gaudry, bishop of Laon.

"Probably," said Colombaik, "poor Bertrand will not join us to-day. This is a feast day, and there are no more feast days for the poor fellow since the murder of his father."

"Yet there comes Bertrand!" cried out one of the militiamen, pointing at a young man, who, pale, frail and sickly-looking, of a timid and kind appearance, wearing a steel casque and armed with a heavy axe that seemed to weigh down his shoulder, was approaching from a distance. "Poor Bertrand!" the militiaman added, "so feeble and wretched! He is excused for not having avenged the death of his father upon our accursed bishop!" Cordially received by his companions, Bertrand answered their solicitous inquiries with some embarrassment, and silently took his place in the ranks. The Mayor arrived soon after, accompanied by his Councilmen, some unarmed, others armed like Ancel Quatre-Mains, who joined them there. John Molrain, the Mayor, a man in the vigor of life and of a countenance at once calm and energetic, marched at the head of the magistrates of the city. One of them carried the banner of the Commune of Laon,—if the steeple of the people's belfries rose daringly in the teeth of the feudal donjons, the communal banners floated no less high than those of the seigneurs. The banner of Laon represented two embattled towers, between which rose a naked sword. The emblem signified: "Our city, fortified by walls, will know how to defend itself by arms against its enemies." Another Councilman carried in a vermillion casket, lying upon a silk cushion, the communal charter, signed by the bishop and the nobles, and confirmed by the signature of Louis the Lusty, King of the French. Finally, a third carried, also upon a cushion, the silver seal of the Commune, which served to attest the acts and decrees rendered by the town Council in the name of

the Commune. This large medal, cast in bass relief, represented the Mayor, who, clad in his long robe and with his right hand pointing heavenward, seemed to be taking the oath, while his left hand held a sword with the point resting on his breast. "I, Mayor of Laon, have sworn to maintain and defend the franchises of the Commune: sooner die than betray my trust!"—such was the patriotic meaning of the communal seal, in short, "Liberty or death!"

When the city magistrate arrived, Fergan, who was issuing his last orders to the militiamen, saw a priest, the archdeacon of the cathedral, called Anselm, step out of the crowd. Fergan held the tonsured fraternity in singular aversion, yet greatly esteemed Anselm, a true disciple of Christ. "Fergan," whispered the archdeacon to the quarryman, "press your friends to redouble their calmness and their prudence, I conjure you. Prevent them from replying to any provocation. I can tell you no more. The time is short. I must proceed to the episcopal palace." Saying this, Anselm disappeared in the crowd. The advice of the archdeacon, a wise man, beloved by all, and, due to his office, in a position to be reliably informed, struck Fergan. He no longer doubted there was a conspiracy, secretly hatched by the episcopals against the Commune. Profoundly preoccupied, he placed himself at the head of his militiamen, in order to escort the Mayor and the Councilmen to the Town Hall. The obscure names of this magistracy, taken from Fergan's family archives, and over which he inscribed the exhortation: "May they be ever dear to your memory, ye sons of Joel!" were: John Molrain, Mayor. Councilmen: Foulque, the son of Bomar; Raoul Cabricoin; Ancel, son-in-law of Labert; Haymon; Payen-Seille; Robert; Remy-But; Menard-Dray, Raimbaut the sausagemaker; Payen-Oste-Loup; Ancel Quatre-Mains, and Raoul-Gastines.

The procession started amidst the joyful acclamations of the crowd, who enthusiastically shouted their rallying-cry: "Com-

mune! Commune!" swollen by the sonorous peals from the belfry, the clerical clangor having finally ceased, due to the apprehension of the episcopals, lest the prolonged ringing of their bells was taken for their participation in the festivities. Before arriving at the place where the Town Hall stood, the procession defiled before the house of the knight of Haut-Pourcin, a large and fortified dwelling, flanked with two thick towers, that were joined by an embattled terrace, projecting above the door. Upon this species of balcony were gathered a large number of knights, clergymen, nobles and elegantly bedezined ladies, some young and handsome, others old and ugly. Among the least old of the latter and yet ugliest of all, the dame of Haut-Pourcin was conspicuous. A gaunt virago of about fifty, bony, of parchment skin, and of arrogant mien, she wore a violet cloak with gold buttons and a cape of peacock feathers; on her grizzly hair she had coquettishly fastened a chaplet of lillies of the valley in full bloom, like a shepherdess. The whiteness of her floral ornaments heightened the yellowish color of the dame's bilious complexion, a complexion, however, that was less yellowish than her long teeth. At sight of the procession, headed by the Mayor and his Councilmen, she turned to those near her, crying out in a sour and piercing voice that was distinctly heard by the communiers, the terrace lying only twelve or fifteen feet above the street! "Mesdames and messeigneurs, have you ever seen a pack of asses tramping to their mill with a more triumphant air?"

"Oh!" answered one of the knights aloud, laughing and pointing with his switch at the Mayor, John Molrain: "And look at the master-ass that leads the rest! How he prances under his furred saddle-cloth!"

"Pity his headgear conceals his long ears from us!"

"Blood of Christ! What a shame to see these Gallic clowns, made slaves by our ancestors, now carrying swords like us of the nobility!" put in the seigneur of Haut-Pourcin. "And we, the

descendants of the conquerors; we knights tolerate such villainy!"

"Halloa, there, Quatre-Mains the baker!" yelled the dame of Haut-Pourcin in a squeaky voice, leaning over the railing of the terrace, "Seigneur Councilman, trotting cuckolded and content while armed for war! The last bread that my butler fetched from your shop was not baked enough, and I suspect you of having cheated me in the weight!"

"Halloa, there, Remy the currier!" added a bulky canon attached to the cathedral, "Seigneur Councilman, who are there loitering about, administering the affairs of the city, why are you not at work on the mule saddle that I ordered?"

"Oh, messeigneurs, there comes the cavalry!" exclaimed a young woman laughing and smelling at a nosegay of sweet marjorams. "Look at the swagger of the vagabond who commands his braves, would you not think he was about to hew down everything in sight?"

"Oh, messeigneurs, look at that hero yonder! Oppressed by his visor, he is carrying his casque front side back and his sabre on his shoulder!"

"And that one, who holds his sword like a wax-taper! Guess he is a Pope's soldier!"

"And yonder goes one who came near putting out the eye of his neighbor with his pike! What a ridiculous set! What silly people!"

"For heaven's sake, messeigneurs, are you not frozen with terror at the thought that, some day, we may find ourselves face to face and lance in hand, with this bourgeoisie, this formidable rabble-rout of shaven fronts, big paunches and flat feet?"

At first, patiently endured by the communiers, these insults, accentuated with outbursts of contemptuous laughter and disdainful gestures, ended, nevertheless, by irritating the more impetuous. Dull murmurs rose from the crowd; the procession halted, despite the entreaties of Fergan, who urged upon the

militiamen the silence of contempt. Some threatened the episcopals with their fists, others with their arms; but their tormentors redoubled their gibes at the sight of such signs of irritation. Suddenly John Molrain, the Mayor, rushing to one of the stone benches, common near the doors of dwellings to assist riders in mounting their horses, jumped upon it, ordered silence, and addressed the crowd in a sonorous voice, that reached the ears of the episcopals:

"Brothers, and all those who have taken the oath of the Commune of Laon, make no reply to impotent insults! Let any dare attack the Commune with deeds and not with words, then will we, your Mayor and Councilmen, summon the offender before our tribunal, and justice will be enforced upon our enemies—prompt and energetic justice! Until then, let us answer all provocation with disdain. The resolute man, strong in his rights, despises insults. At the hour of judgment, he condemns and punishes!"

These wise and measured words quieted the excitement of the crowd, but they also reached the ears of the nobles, assembled on the terrace of the house of the seigneur of Haut-Pourcin, and added fuel to their rage. They menaced the communiers with their canes and swords, while redoubling their gibes. "Your swords are not long enough, they do not reach us!" Colombaik cried out to them, while passing under the balcony with his division of the militia. "Come down into the street! We shall then see whether iron is heavier in the hands of a bourgeois than in that of a knight!"

This challenge was answered by the episcopals with fresh insults. However, they dared not descend into the street, where they would have been seized and taken prisoners by the militia. For a moment delayed on its march, the procession resumed its way and arrived at the place of the Town Hall, a monument dear to the artisans and other townsmen.

The edifice, a spacious and handsome structure recently erect-

ed, formed an oblong square. Elaborate sculptures ornamented its facade and the lintels of its numerous windows and architrave, which consisted of three ogive arcades sustained by elegant sheaves of stone columns. But the portion of the edifice upon which particular care had been devoted, both in point of construction and ornamentation, was the tower of the belfry and the campanile, where hung the bell. This tower, proudly rising above the roof, stood out in full view. From tier to tier a slender sheet supported rounds of small columns surmounted with ogives chiseled in trefoil, so that across the network of chiseled stone the spiral of the staircase was visible that led up to the campanile, veiled in white cloth up to the moment when the procession issued upon the place. When the covering dropped off and the campanile stood unveiled, a shout of admiration and patriotic enthusiasm rose from all breasts. Nothing so airy as that campanile, looking like a gilded cage of iron, whose outlines stood out against the blue of the sky like a lace-work of gold, glittering in the rays of the sun. Above the dazzling dome, the communal banner floated in the spring breeze of that beautiful April morning. The enthusiastic cheers of the crowds rose again and again, and the north wind must have carried to the ears of the episcopals the cry, a thousand times repeated:

"Commune! Commune! Long live the Commune!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL SEIGNIORY OF GAUDRY.

The episcopal palace of Laon rose close to the cathedral. Thick walls, fortified with two heavy towers, between which stood the gate, surrounded the dwelling from all sides. From the view-point of the benign morality of Jesus—the friend of the poor and the afflicted—nothing was less episcopal than the interior of this palace. One would imagine himself in the fortified castle of some feudal seigneur, a broiler and hunter. The singular contrast between the place and the character that it should have presented, left a painful impression upon all upright hearts, and such, indeed, was the feeling experienced by archdeacon Anselm, when, shortly after engaging Fergan to urge upon the communiers indifference towards the provocations of the episcopals, that disciple of Christ crossed the yard of the bishop. Here falconers were engaged washing and preparing the raw meat destined for the falcons, or cleaned up their roosts; yonder, the huntsmen, their horns on their guard-chains and whip in hand, led for pastime a pack of large dogs of Picardy, prized so highly by hunters. Further away, serfs of the episcopal domain were being drilled in the handling of arms under the command of one of the bishop's equerries. This last circumstance struck the archdeacon with amazement, and increased his fears for the peace of the city. The venerable man was overcome with sadness and two large tears dropped from his eyes.

Although an associate of clergymen, Anselm was a man of great kindness of heart, pure, disinterested, austere and of rare learning. He was called "doctor of doctors." He declined the episcopacy several times, fearing, it was said, to seem to cen-

sure, by the Christian meekness of his nature and the chastity of his habits, the conduct of most of the bishops of Gaul. His face, at once pale and serene, his hair thinned by study, imparted a distinguished aspect to his person, tempered by the kindliness of his eyes. Modestly dressed in his black gown, Anselm was slowly crossing the yard of the abbey, contrasting their noisy tumult with the repose of his own studious retreat, when he saw, approaching him from a distance, a negro of giant stature, dressed in Oriental garb, his head covered with a red turban. This African slave, of mean and savage physiognomy, was named John since his baptism. He was, many years before, given as a present to Bishop Gaudry by a Crusader seigneur, returned from the Holy Land. By little and little Black John grew to be the favorite of his new master, the intermediary of the latter's debaucheries, or the instrument of his cruelties, before the establishment of the Commune. Since that transformation, the persons and property of the communiers had become safe. If an injury was done to either, the Commune obtained or itself enforced justice against the wrong-doer. Accordingly, the bishop and the nobles had been forced to renounce their habits of violence and rapine.

When the archdeacon saw Black John, the latter was descending a staircase that ended in a door, wrought under a vault closed with a grating, that separated the first two walks of a green reserved for the bishop. A woman, wrapped in a mantle that completely concealed her face, accompanied the slave. Anselm could not restrain a gesture of indignation. Knowing the dwellers of the palace, and aware that the staircase under the vault led to the apartments of the bishop, he had no doubt that the veiled woman, leaving the palace at so early an hour and under the guide of Black John, the bishop's regular procurer, had passed the night with the prelate. Blushing with chaste confusion, the archdeacon had turned his head away with disgust at the moment when, having opened the grated gate, the slave

and his female companion passed close by him. Stepping into the vault, the archdeacon entered the green,—a spacious enclosure, that, swarded and planted with trees, spread before the windows of the private apartments of Bishop Gaudry.

This man, a Norman by extraction and descended from the pirates of old Rolf, after having fought in the ranks of William the Bastard, when he conquered England, was later, in 1106, promoted to the bishopric of Laon. Cruel and debauched, covetous and prodigal, Gaudry was, besides all, a passionate huntsman. Still agile and vigorous, although beyond the prime of life, he was at that moment trying a young horse and breaking it in to step on the green that Anselm had just entered. In order to feel more at ease, the bishop had taken off his long morning robe, lined with fur, and kept on nothing but his sock-pointed shoes, his hose and a short jacket of flexible material. Bareheaded, his gray hair to the wind, still an able and bold cavalier, and riding bare-back the young stallion, that had for the first time come from the paddock, Gaudry was pressing his nervy knees against the flanks of the mettlesome animal, resisting its boundings and kicking, and forcing it to run in a circle over the sward of the green. The bishop's equerry applauded with voice and gesture the skill of his master, while a serf of robust frame and gallows-bird countenance followed the riding lesson with cunning eyes. This serf, who belonged to the abbey of St. Vincent, a fief of the bishopric, was named Thiegaud. The fellow—originally charged with the collection of toll over a bridge near the city, a dependency of the castellan Enguerrand de Coucy, one of the most ferocious feudal tyrants of Picardy who was dreaded for his audacity and cruelty—had been guilty of a number of extortions and even murders. Gaudry, struck by the resolute character of the scamp, demanded him from the castellan of Coucy in exchange for another serf, and charged him with the collection of the arbitrary taxes that he imposed upon his vassals, a charge that Thiegaud filled with remorseless severity.

Thus the bishop treated the serf with great familiarity, habitually called him his "friend Ysengrin"—the wolf's companion—and, at a pinch, used him for a go-between in his debaucheries, not, however, without awakening the vindictive jealousy of Black John, who felt secretly enraged at the sight of another than himself in the secret confidence of his master.

Gaudry, while riding around the green, saw the archdeacon, made the stallion suddenly face about, and after a few more boundings the impetuous animal brought the bishop close to Anselm. Lightly jumping off, the bishop said to his equerry, throwing the bridle over to him: "I'll keep the horse; take him to my stables; he will be matchless in the hunt of stags and boars!"

"If you keep the horse, seigneur bishop," answered Thiegaud, "give me a hundred and twenty silver sous. That's the price they demand."

"That's all right. What's the hurry?" rejoined the bishop, and turning to his equerry: "Gerhard, take the horse to the stable."

"Not so," said Thiegaud, "the tenant-farmer is waiting at the gate of the palace. He has been ordered to take the horse back or receive its price in money. It is the orders of the owner of the stallion."

"The impudent scamp who gave that order deserves to receive as many lashes as his horse has hairs in his tail!" cried out the bishop. "Have I not, as a matter of right, six months' credit in my own seigniory?"

"No," coolly answered Anselm, "that seignioral right has been abolished since the city of Laon is a free Commune. Never forget the difference between the present and the past. The seignioral rights are abolished."

"I am reminded of that but too often!" answered the bishop with concentrated vexation. "However that may be, Gerhard, obey my orders and take the horse to the stable."

"Seigneur," said Thiegaud, "the owner is waiting, I tell you. He must have the money, a hundred and twenty silver sous, or the animal back."

"He shall not have the horse!" answered the bishop angrily striking the ground. "If the farmer dares to grumble, tell him to send me his master. We shall see whether he will have the audacity to appear on such an errand before his bishop."

"He will surely have the audacity, seigneur bishop," replied Thiegaud. "The owner of the horse is Colombaik the Tanner, a communier of Laon and son of Fergan, master quarryman of the mill hill. I know these people. I notify you that the father and son are of those . . . who dare . . . anything."

"Blood of Christ! and devil's horns! we have had words enough!" cried out the bishop. "Gerhard, take the stallion to the stables!"

The equerry obeyed, and the archdeacon was on the point of remonstrating with Gaudry on the injustice and danger of his conduct, when, hearing a great noise in the yards contiguous to the green, the bishop, already in a bad humor and yielding to the passion of his temperament, rushed out of the green, without taking time to put on his robe again and leaving it behind on a bench. He had hardly crossed the first yard, followed by the equerry, who led the horse, and by Thiegaud, who in his perversity was smiling at this latest iniquity of his master, when he saw a crowd of the domestics of his household coming towards him. They were all yelling and gesticulating violently, and surrounded Black John, whose gigantic stature rose above them by the full length of his head. No less excited than his fellows, Black John also yelled and gesticulated, foaming at the mouth with rage and brandishing his Saracen dagger.

"What means this hurly?" inquired the bishop of Laon stepping before the advancing crowd. "Why do you scream in that way?"

Several voices answered at once: "We are crying out against the bourgeois of Laon! The dogs of the communiers!"

"What has happened? Answer quick!"

"Black John will tell monseigneur!" several voices called in great excitement.

The African giant turned towards his fellows, motioned them to be silent, and wiping on his sleeves the bloody blade of his dagger, said to the bishop in an excited voice, still trembling with rage, but not without calculatingly casting upon Thiegaud a look of rancorous hatred:

"I had just led Mussine the Pretty to the outer gate—"

"My daughter!" Thiegaud ejaculated stupefied at the very moment when, angrily stamping the ground, the prelate checked the indiscreet words of his slave with a silent gesture. Black John remained mute like one who understands too late the folly he committed, while the rest of the bishop's domestics stealthily giggled at the consternation of Thiegaud. Some dreaded him for his malignity, others envied him for his intimate relations with their master. Thiegaud, livid at the startling revelation, flashed at Gaudry a sinister look quick as lightning; his features thereupon as quickly reassumed their usual expression, and he started to laugh louder than the rest at the awkward blunder of Black John. He even went the length of indulging in ironical deference towards Gaudry. The latter, long acquainted with the criminal life of the serf of St. Vincent, was not surprised at seeing him remain so indifferent to the disgrace of his daughter. Nevertheless, yielding to that respect for man that even the most depraved characters never succeed in wholly stripping themselves of, the bishop silenced the suppressed merriment with an imperious gesture and said: "Those giggles are unseemly. Thiegaud's daughter came early in the morning, as so many other penitents do, to consult me on a case of conscience. After listening to her in the confessional, I ordered John to accompany her to the gate."

"That's so true," added Thiegaud with perfect composure, "that, having to bring this morning a horse to our seigneur the bishop, I expected to return with my daughter. But she left by the vaulted door while I was still on the green."

"Friend Ysengrin," resumed the prelate with a mixture a haughtiness and familiarity, "my words can dispense with your testimony." And wishing to cut off short this incident, which had the archdeacon, silent but profoundly indignant, for a witness, Gaudry said to the black slave: "Speak! What has happened between you and the communiers, whom may the pest carry off and hell confound! May Satan take them all!"

"I was opening the gate for Mussine the Pretty, when three bourgeois, coming from the suburbs and bound for the principal entry of the city, to assist at the ceremonies announced by the belfry of those rogues, passed by the palace. Seeing a veiled woman come out, those scamps set up a malicious laugh, and nudged one another in the ribs while keeping on their way. I ran after them and asked: 'What are you laughing about, you dogs of communiers?' They gave me an insolent answer and called me the bishop's hangman. I then drew my dagger and stabbed one of them in the arm, and leaving his companions and him loudly threatening to demand justice from the Commune, I returned and locked the door after me. By Mahomet, I am proud of what I did. I avenged my master for the insults of those curs!"

"Black John did well!" cried the domestics of the bishop. "We can no longer go out without being shamed by the communiers of Laon."

"The other day," put in one of the falconers, "the butcher of Exchange street, one of the Councilmen of the Commune, refused to give me meat on credit for the falcons!"

"At the taverns we are compelled to pay before drinking! The shame and humiliation of it!"

"It was not thus three years ago!"

"Those were good days! A retainer of the bishop then took without paying whatever he wanted from the merchants; he caressed their wives and daughters; and none dared say a word. By the womb of the Virgin Mary, we were then masters! But since the establishment of the Commune it is the bourgeois who command! The devil take the Commune! Three cheers for the good old times!"

"To hell with the communiers, they make us die of shame for our seigneur the bishop!" exclaimed one of the young serfs who had been shortly before exercising in the use of arms. And resolutely addressing the prelate, who, so far from quieting down the excitement of his people, seemed delighted at their recriminations, and encouraged them with a smile of approval: "Say the word, our bishop! There are here fifty of us who have learned to manage the bow and pike! Place a few knights at our head, and we will descend upon the city, leaving not a stone upon another of the houses of that bourgeois and artisan rabble!"

"Say the word!" cried out Thiegaud, "and I will bring you, my holy patron, a hundred woodsmen and colliers from the forest of St. Vincent. They will make a bonfire of the houses of those bourgeois and artisans fit to roast Beelzebub! Death and damnation to the communiers!"

If the bishop of Laon had entertained any doubt upon the indifference of the serf of St. Vincent regarding his daughter's shame, it was removed by the man's words. Accordingly, doubly satisfied with the tokens of Thiegaud's devotion, the bishop addressed his people in these words: "I am glad to find you in such a frame of mind. Remain so. The hour for going to work will arrive sooner than you may think. As to you, my brave John, you have avenged me on the insolence of those communiers. Fear not. Not a hair of your head shall be touched. As to you, friend Ysengrin, notify the farmer that I keep the horse, and I shall pay him if I choose. Then, see our friends the woodsmen and colliers of the forest. I may need them any day. When

that day shall come, they shall be free, in reward for their good will, to plunder at their pleasure the houses of the bourgeois of Laon." Turning thereupon towards the archdeacon, who had witnessed this scene without uttering a word, he said to him: "Let's go in. What has just taken place under your own eyes will have prepared you for the interview we are to have, and for which I summoned you hither."

Anselm followed the prelate, and both entered the bishop's apartments.

"Anselm, you have just seen and heard things that, doubtlessly, left a disagreeable impression upon your mind. We shall take that up presently," said Gaudry to the archdeacon when they were closeted together. "I summoned you to the palace because I am aware of your foible for the common folks of the bourgeoisie, and in order to afford you the opportunity to render a signal service to your favorites. Listen to me carefully."

"I shall strive to meet your intentions, seigneur bishop."

"You shall go to the bourgeois and artisans of the city and say to them: 'Renounce, good people, that execrable spirit of novelty, that diabolical passion that drives the vassal to rise against his master. Abjure, soon as possible, the brazen and impious pride that persuades the artisan and townsman to withdraw from the seignioral authority and to govern themselves. Return to your trades, to your shops. The administration of public affairs can get along very well without you. You quit the Church for the Town Hall; you open your ears to the sound of your own belfry, and shut them to the chimes of the church bells. That is not good for you. You will end by forgetting the submission you owe to the clergy, to the nobles and to the King. Good people, never allow the distinctions of the stations in life to be confounded; each to his rights, each to his duties. The right of the clergy, of the nobility and of the King is to command and to govern; the duty of the serf and the bourgeois is to bow before the will of their natural masters. This communal

and republican comedy, that you have been playing for now nearly three years, has lasted too long. Abdicate willingly your roles of Mayor, Councilmen and warriors. People at first laughed at your silly pranks, hoping you would return to your senses. But it takes too long; one's patience is exhausted. The time has come to put an end to the Saturnalia. In order to avoid a just punishment, return of your own accord to the humility of your station in life. Cut your Councilmen's robes into skirts for your wives; return your arms to people who know how to handle them; respectfully surrender to the Church, as an homage of atonement, that ear-splitting bell of that belfry of yours; it will enrich the chimes of the cathedral. Your superb banner will make a becoming altar-cloth, and as to your magnificent silver seal, melt it back into money wherewith to purchase some hogsheads of old wine which you will empty in honor of the restoration of the seigniory of your bishop in Jesus Christ. Do so, and all will be well, good people. The past will be forgiven you upon condition that you will henceforth be submissive, humble and penitent towards the Church, the noblemen and the King, and that of your own accord, you renounce your pestiferous Commune.'"

Anselm listened to the bishop with a mixture of amazement, indignation and profound anxiety. He did not interrupt the speaker to the end, wondering how that man, whom he could not deny either cleverness or sagacity, yet could be so untutored upon men and things as to conceive such a project. So profound was the emotion of the archdeacon that he remained silent for a while. Finally he answered the bishop in a grave and clear voice: "You solicit my assistance to advise the inhabitants of Laon to give up their charter, that very charter that both you and they have agreed to and sworn to uphold by a common accord?"

"That agreement was concluded by the chapter and council of

seigneurs who governed during my absence, while I was away in England."

"Must I remind you that, upon your return from London, and in consideration of a large sum paid by the bourgeoisie, you signed the charter with your own hand, that you sealed it with your own seal, and that you swore upon your faith that it would be faithfully observed?"

"I was wrong in doing so. The Church holds her seigniories from God alone. She may not alienate her rights. I am absolved from such engagements."

"Have you returned the money that you received for your consent to the Commune? Has restitution been made?"

"The money I received represented, at the most, four years' revenues that I habitually drew from the inhabitants of Laon. Three years have elapsed since the establishment of this Commune. I am only one year in advance of my vassals. My right is to tax at will and mercy. I shall double the tax of the current year, and being quits, I shall, if I please, demand the tax for the next year."

"Yours would be such a right had you not alienated it. But you cannot repudiate your signature, your seal and your oath. Your engagement is binding."

"What is there in a signature? One or two words placed at the bottom of a parchment! What is a seal? A lump of wax! What is an oath? A breath of air that is lost in space, and which the wind carries off!"

Although highly wrought up by the prelate's answer, Anselm restrained his indignation and proceeded: "You, then, persist in your purpose to break your oath and abolish the Commune of Laon?"

"Yes, I intend to smash it."

"You refuse to keep your sacred engagement? Be it so! But the communiers of Laon have had their charter confirmed by the present King. They will turn to him to compel you to respect

its clauses. You will have two foes to face—the people and the King."

"To-morrow," answered the bishop, "Louis the Lusty will be here at the head of a goodly number of knights and men-at-arms,—all resolved to crush those miserable bourgeois if they dare defend their Commune. It is all settled between us."

"I can hardly believe what you say, seigneur bishop," replied the archdeacon. "The King, who confirmed and swore to the charter for the enfranchisement of the bourgeois of Laon, and who received the price agreed upon, he surely will not be ready to perjure himself and commit such an infamy."

"The King begins to listen to the voice of the Church. He understands that, though it be good politics and profitable withal, to sell charters of emancipation to the cities that are subject to lay seigniories, his rivals and ours, it is to seriously compromise his own power if he were to favor emancipation from the ecclesiastical seigniories. The King is determined to restore to the episcopal authority all the ecclesiastical cities that have been enfranchised, and to exterminate their inhabitants if they dare oppose his pleasure. To-morrow, perhaps this very day, the King will be in the city at the head of armed men. The nobles of the city have been apprised, like myself, of the pending arrival of the King. We shall notify our will to the people."

"My presentiments did not deceive me when I urged the communiers to redouble their self-control and prudence!"

"You were on the right road. It is, therefore, that, aware of your influence with those clowns, I sent for you, to commission you to induce them to renounce their hellish Commune of their own free will, if they would escape a terrible punishment. We demand absolute submission."

"Bishop of Laon," Anselm answered solemnly and with a tremulous voice, "I decline the mission that you charge me with. I do not wish to see the blood of my brothers flow in this city. If your projects were but suspected, an uprising would break out

on the spot among the people, and yourself, the clergy and the knights in the city would be the first victims of the rage of the communiers. Your houses would be burned down over your heads."

"There is no insurrection to be feared," put in the bishop laughingly loudly. "John, my negro, will take by the nose the wildest of those clowns and will bring him on his knees to my feet, begging for mercy, trembling and penitent. I need but to say the word."

"If you dare touch the rights of the Commune, then you, the priests and the nobles will all be exterminated by the people in arms. Oh, may heaven's curse fall upon me before I shall by a single word help to unchain such a storm!"

"So, then, you, Anselm, a subordinate to my authority, you refuse the commission that I charge you with?"

"I swear to you upon the salvation of my soul, you are staking your life at a terrible game! May I not have to dispute your bleeding remains from the popular fury in order to give them Christian burial!"

CHAPTER V.

BOURGEOIS AND ECCLESIASTICAL SEIGNEUR.

The Bishop of Loan had long remained steeped in revery. The tone of conviction, the imposing authority of the archdeacon's character, left a profound impression upon the man. Though there was no crime he would recoil at in the satisfaction of his passions, yet he fervently clung to life. Accordingly, his blind contempt for the common people notwithstanding, he wavered for a moment in his projects, and, recalling to memory the triumphant revolts, that under similar circumstances, had in recent years been witnessed in other Communes of Gaul, he was lost in sombre, silent perplexity, when the sudden entry of Black John awoke him from his quandary.

"Patron," said Black John, breaking into the room with a malefic grin, "one of the bourgeois dogs has himself walked into the trap. We are holding him, as well as his female, who, by Mahomet, is of the comliest. If the husband is a mastiff, the wife is a dainty greyhound, worthy of a place in the ecclesiastical kennels!"

"Quit your jokes!" remarked the bishop with impatience. "What is the matter now? Speak up!"

"A minute ago there was a rap at the main gate. I was in the yard with the serfs who are exercising in arms. I peeped through the wicket and saw a burly fellow, with a casque that fell over his nose, and bursting in his steel corselet, and as incommoded by his sword as a dog to whose tail a kettle has been tied. A young and pretty woman accompanied him. 'What do you want?' said I to the man. 'To speak with the seigneur bishop, and on the spot, too, on grave matters.' To hold one of

these dogs of communiers in pawn, struck me as timely. After sending one of the men to see through the loopholes in the tower whether the bourgeois was alone, I opened the door. Oh, you would have laughed," Black John proceeded, "had you seen the good man embrace his wife before crossing the threshold of the palace, as though he were stepping into Lucifer's house, and heard his wife say: 'I shall wait for you here; my uneasiness will be shorter than if I had remained at the Town Hall.' By Mahomet! I said to myself, my patron is too fond of receiving pretty penitents to leave this charmer outside; and taking her up like a feather I carried her into the yard. I had a good mind to shut the gate in the husband's face, but I considered it was better to keep him too here. His little wife, furious like a cat in love, screamed and scratched my face when I took her up in my arms, but after she was allowed to join her gander of a husband, she put on airs of bravery and spat in my face. They are both in the next room. Shall they be brought in?"

The announcement of the arrival of one of the communiers, the objects of the bishop's hatred, revived the anger of the seigniorial ecclesiastic, that had been checked for a moment by the words of Archdeacon Anselm. The bishop jumped up, crying out: "By heaven! By the Pope's navel! That bourgeois arrives in time! Bring him in!"

"His wife too?" asked the negro, opening the door. "She will act as a counter-irritant to your worship," and without waiting for his master's answer, the negro vanished.

"Take care!" Anselm said, more and more alarmed. "Take care what you are about to do! The Councilmen are elected by the inhabitants! To do violence to one of their chosen men would be a moral offence!"

"We have had enough remonstrances!" cried out Gaudry with haughty impatience. "You seem to forget that I am your superior, your bishop!"

"It is your conduct that would make me forget it. But it is for the sake of the episcopacy, for the sake of the salvation of

your soul, for the sake of your own life that I adjure you not to apply the match to a conflagration that neither yourself nor the King might be able to extinguish!"

"What!" exclaimed the bishop with a wrathful sneer; "What! That conflagration could not be extinguished even in the blood of those damned dogs, of the revolted clowns, themselves?"

The prelate had just pronounced these execrable words, when Ancel Quatre-Mains entered, accompanied by his wife, Simonne, and preceeded by Black John, who, leaving them at the door of the apartment, withdrew again with a smile on his cruel lips. The Councilman was pale and deeply moved. The good nature, habitual to his features, had now made place to an expression of deliberate firmness. It must, nevertheless, be admitted that his casque thrown too far back on his head and his stomach protruding below his steel corselet imparted to the townsman an almost grotesque appearance that could not fail to strike the Bishop of Laon. Accordingly breaking out in a loud guffaw, not unmixed with rage and disdain, and pointing to Ancel, he said to the archdeacon: "Here have you a bright sample of the gallant men who are to cause bishops, knights and kings to tremble and retreat. By the blood of Christ, what a grotesque appearance!"

The Councilman and his wife, who drew close to him, looked at each other, unable to understand the words of the bishop. No less alarmed than her husband, two distinct sentiments seemed to fill Simonne's mind—fear of some danger to Ancel and horror for Gaudry.

"Well, now, seigneur Councilman, august elective magistrate of the illustrious Commune of Laon!" said the prelate in a jeering and contemptuous accent. "You wanted to see me. Here I am. What do you want?"

"Seigneur bishop, I have had no ambition, and so I haven't, of coming here. I'm merely fulfilling a duty. This month I'm

the judicial Councilman. As such, I am charged with the trials. It is in that capacity that I have come here to fill my office."

"Oh, oh! Greetings to you, seigneur prosecutor!" replied the prelate sneeringly, bowing before the baker. "May we at least know the subject of the process?"

"Certes, seigneur bishop, seeing the action is against yourself and against John, your African servant, I shall inform you of the charge."

"And while my husband is fulfilling a judicial mission," pertly put in Simonne, "he shall also demand justice and indemnity for the insults hurled at me by the noble dame of Haut-Pourcin, the wife of one of the episcopals of the city, so please your seigneur bishop!"

"By heaven, my negro John was right, I have never seen a prettier creature!" observed the dissolute bishop, attentively examining the baker's wife, whom until that instant he had taken little notice of; and seeming to reflect for a moment he asked: "How long have you been married, little darling? Answer your bishop truthfully!"

"Five years, monseigneur."

"My good man," resumed Gaudry addressing the Councilman, "you must have ransomed your wife from the right of the first night at the time when the canon of Amaury was charged with its supervision?"

"Yes, seigneur," answered the baker, while his wife, casting down her eyes, blushed with shame at hearing the bishop refer to that infamous right of the bishop of Laon, who, before the establishment of the Commune had the right to demand "first wedding night of the bride"—a galling shame, that, occasionally, the husband managed to redeem with a money payment.

"That miserable beggar of old Amaury!" exclaimed the prelate with a cynical outburst of laughter. "It was all in vain for me to tell him: 'When a bride and bridegroom come to announce at church their approaching wedding, inscribe on a separate roll the names of the brides that are comely enough to

induce me to exact from them the amorous tax of nature.' But there were none of these according to Amaury; and yet I have before my eyes a striking proof of his fraudulence or his blindness. Almost all the brides were homely, according to him!"

"Happily, seigneur bishop, those evil days are gone by," answered Ancel, hardly able to restrain his indignation. "Those days will never return when the honor of husbands and wives was at the mercy of bishops and seigneurs!"

"Brother," put in the archdeacon, painfully affected by the words of the bishop, and addressing Ancel, "believe me, the Church herself blushes at that monstrous right, that prelates enjoy when they are at once temporal seigneurs."

"What I do know, Father Anselm," the baker answered with judicial deliberateness and raising his head, "is that the Church does not forbid the ecclesiastics to use that monstrous right, we see them using it and deflowering young brides."

"By the blood of Christ!" cried out the bishop, while the archdeacon remained silent, unable to gainsay the baker; "that right proves better than any argument how absolutely the body of the serf, the villein or the non-noble vassal is the absolute and undisputed property of the lay or ecclesiastical seigneur. Accordingly, so far from blushing at that right, the Church claims it back for its own seigneurs, and excommunicates those who dare contest it."

The archdeacon, not daring to contradict the bishop, seeing the bishop spoke the truth, lowered his head in mute pain. The Councilman resumed with a mixture of sly good nature and firmness: "I am, seigneur bishop, too ignorant in matters of theology to discuss the orthodoxy of a right that honorable folks speak of only with indignation in their hearts and shame on their brows. But, thanks be to God, since Laon has become an enfranchised Commune, that abominable right has been abolished, along with many others. Among the latter is the right of demanding goods without money, and of taking some one else's

horse without paying for it. This, seigneur bishop, leads me to the matter that has brought me here."

"You, then, mean to start a process against me?"

"I am fulfilling my functions. An hour ago, Peter the Fox, tenant farmer of Colombaik the Tanner, deposed before the Mayor and Councilmen assembled at the Town Hall that you, Bishop of Laon, kept, against all right, a horse belonging to the said Colombaik, and that you refuse to pay the price demanded by the owner."

"Is that all?" the bishop asked laughing. "Have I committed no other sin? Have you no other charges to bring against me?"

"Germain the Strong, master carpenter of the suburb of Grande-Cognee, supported by two witnesses, has deposed before the Mayor and Councilmen that, while passing before the gate of the episcopal palace, he was first insulted and then stabbed in the arm by Black John, a domestic of your household, which constitutes a grave crime."

"Well, then, seigneur justiciary," said the bishop still laughing, "Condemn me, brave Councilman. Formulate your judgment and sentence."

"Not yet," coldly answered the baker. "The suit must first be entered; then the witnesses must be heard; next comes the judgment; and fourth its enforcement. Everything in its order."

"Just see! I am instructed! Let it be, I shall be patient. Yet I am curious to see how far your audacity will lead you, communier of Satan. Go ahead and to work!"

"My audacity is that of a man who fulfills his duty."

"An honest man, who dares not allow himself to be intimidated," put in Simonne with deftness; "a man who will know how to cause the rights of the Commune to be respected, who is not troubled by disdain. A man of sense and of action."

"I love to see your rougish face," replied the bishop, turning

to the young woman; "it gives me the necessary humor to listen to this loafer, I swear it by your round and plump throat, by your beautiful black eyes, and by your secret charms!"

"And I swear by the poor eyes of Gerhard of Soisson, whom you have so cruelly deprived of sight, that the sight of you is odious to me, Bishop of Laon! You, whose hands are still red with the blood of Bernard des Bruyeres, whom you murdered in your own church!" And uttering these imprudent words, drawn from her by an impulse of generous indignation, the baker's wife brusquely turned her back upon the bishop.

Enraged at hearing himself reproached in such a manner for two of his crimes, the Bishop of Laon became livid with rage, and half rising from his seat, whose arms he clutched convulsively, he cried out: "Miserable serf! I shall teach you to control your viper's tongue!—"

"Simonne!" said the Councilman to his wife in a tone of earnest reproof, interrupting the prelate. "You should not speak that way. Those past crimes belong before the bar of God, not of the Commune, as are the misdemeanors that I am prosecuting. The bishop is summoned to answer only the two charges that I have preferred."

"I shall save you half your trouble!" cried out Gaudry in a towering rage, and dropping his jeering tone towards the Councilman. "I declare that I am keeping a farmer's horse; I declare that my negro John stabbed a clown of the city this morning. Now, then, decide, you stupid brute!"

"Seeing you admit these wrong-doings, seigneur Bishop of Laon, I decide that you return the horse to its owner, or that you pay him his price, a hundred and twenty silver sous; and I decide that you render justice for the crime committed by your black slave John."

"And I shall keep the horse without paying for it; and I hold that my servant John did justly punish an insolent communier! Now, pronounce your sentence."

"Bishop of Laon, those are very serious words," answered the Councilman with emotion. "I conjure you, deign to think that over while I shall read to you aloud two clauses from our charter, sworn to by yourself, signed with your own hand, and sealed with your own seal; do not forget that; and moreover confirmed by our seigneur the King." Whereat the Councilman, producing a parchment from his pocket, read as follows: "'If anyone injure a man who shall have taken the oath of the Commune of Laon, a complaint being lodged with the Mayor and Councilmen, they shall, after due trial, enforce justice upon the body and upon the property of the guilty party. . . . If the guilty party takes refuge in a fortified castle, the Mayor and Councilmen shall notify the seigneur of the castle, or his lieutenant. If in their opinion satisfaction shall have been rendered against the guilty party, that will suffice; but if the seigneur refuses satisfaction, they shall themselves enforce justice upon the property and upon the men of the said seigneur.' That, seigneur bishop, is the law of our Commune, agreed and sworn to by yourself and us. If, then, you do not return the horse, if you do not give us satisfaction for the crime of your servant John, we shall see ourselves forced to ourselves enforce justice upon you and upon your men."

Certain of the support of the King, the bishop and the episcopals had for some time desired to provoke a conflict with the communiers. They felt certain of success, and looked in that way to reconquer by force their seigniorial rights, a one-time inexhaustible treasure, but alienated by them three years previous, for a considerable sum of money, that had by this time been dissipated. By refusing to satisfy the legitimate demands of the Councilmen, the bishop was inevitably bound to lead to a collision at the very moment when Louis the Lusty would arrive at Laon with a numerous troop of knights. Accordingly, making no doubt that the people would be crushed in the struggle, and considering himself seconded by circumstance, Gaudry,

so far from angrily answering the baker, now replied with a sarcastic affectation of humility: "Alack, illustrious Councilman, poor seigneurs that we are, we shall have no choice but to try and resist you, my valiant Caesars, and to prevent you from enforcing justice upon our goods and our persons, as you triumphantly announce. We shall have to don our casques and cuirasses, and await you, lance in hand, mounted on our battle horses! Alack!"

"Seigneur bishop," answered the baker, anxiously joining his hands, "your refusal to do justice to the Commune, is equivalent to a declaration of war between our townsmen and you!"

"Alack!" replied Gaudry ironically imitating Ancel's gesture, "we shall then have to resign ourselves to battle. Fortunately the episcopal knights know how to manage the lance and sword wherewith they will run you through."

"The battle will be terrible in our city," cried out the Councilman excitedly. "Why would you reduce us to such extremities, when it depends upon you to avert such a calamity by proving yourself equitable and faithful to your oath?"

"I implore you, yield to these wise words," now put in the archdeacon addressing Gaudry. "Your refusal will unchain all the scourges of civil war, and cause torrents of blood to flow. Woe is us!"

"Seigneur bishop," the Councilman resumed with insistence and in a sad yet firm tone: "What is it that we demand of you? Justice. Nothing more. Return the horse or pay for it. Your servant has committed a crime. Inflict exemplary punishment upon him. Is that asking too much of you? Are you ready by your resistance to hand over our beloved country to innumerable calamities, and cause the shedding of blood? Reflect on the consequences of the conflict. Think of the women whom you will have widowed, the children whom you will have orphaned! Think of the calamities that you will conjure over our city!"

"I'm bound to think, heroic Councilman," replied the bishop with a disdainful sneer, "that you are afraid of war!"

"No, we are not afraid!" cried out Simonne, unable longer to control her impetuous nature. "Let the belfry summon the inhabitants to the defense of the Commune, and you will see that, as at Beauvais, as at Noyons, as at Rheims, the men will fly to arms and the women will accompany them to nurse the wounded!"

"By the blood of Christ, my charming Amazon, if I take you prisoner, you will pay the arrears due to your seigneur."

"Seigneur bishop," interposed the Councilman, "such words ill-become the mouth of a priest, above all when the issue is bloodshed. We dread war! Yes, undoubtedly, we dread it, because its evils are irreparable. I fear war as much or more than anyone else, because I wish to live for my wife, whom I love, and to enjoy in peace our modest means, the fruit of our daily labor. I fear war by reason of the disasters and the ruin that follow upon its wake."

"But you will fight like any other!" cried out Simonne almost irritated at the sincerity of her husband. "Oh, I know you! You will fight even more bravely than others!"

"More bravely than others is saying too much," naively interposed the baker. "I have never fought in my life. But I shall do my duty, although I am less at home with the lance or the sword than with the poker of the furnace in my bakery. Each to his trade."

"Admit it, good man," retorted the bishop laughing uproariously, "you prefer the fire of your furnace to the heat of battle?"

"On my faith, that's the truth of it, seigneur bishop. All of us good people of the city, bourgeois and artisans that we are, prefer good to evil, peace to war. But, take my word for it, there are things we prefer to peace, they are the honor of our wives, our daughters and sisters, our dignity, our independence, the right of ourselves and through ourselves to administering

the affairs of our city. We owe these advantages to our enfranchisement from the seigniorial rights. Accordingly, we shall all allow ourselves to be killed, to the last man, in the defence of our Commune and in the protection of our freedom. That's why, in the name of the public peace, we implore you to do justice to our demand."

"Patron," broke in at this point Black John who entered the room precipitately, "a forerunner of the King has just arrived. He announces that he precedes his master only two hours, and that he comes accompanied with a strong escort."

"The King must have hastened his arrival!" cried out the prelate triumphantly. "By the blood of Christ, everything is working according to our wishes!"

"The King!" exclaimed the Councilman with joy, "The King in our city! Oh, we now have nothing more to fear. He signed our charter, he will know how to compel you to respect it, Bishop of Laon. Your wicked intentions will now be paralyzed."

"Certes!" answered Gaudry with a sardonic smile. "Count with the support of the King, good people. He comes in person, followed by a large troop of knights armed with strong lances and sharp swords. Now, then, my valiant bourgeois, go and join your shop heroes, and carry my answer to them. It is this: 'Gaudry, bishop and seigneur of Laon, certain of the support of the King of the French, awaits in his episcopal palace to see the communiers come themselves to enforce justice upon his property and his men!' And turning then to Black John: "Order my equerry to saddle the stallion that was brought here this morning. I know no more mettlesome horse to ride on ahead of the King and in the beard of those city clowns. Let the knights of the city be notified, they shall serve for my escort. To horse! To horse!" Saying which, the prelate stepped off into another room, leaving the baker as stupefied as he was alarmed at the sight of his crumbling hopes. He heard the bishop's words re-

garding the King's intention, yet hesitated to give them credence. The townsman remained thunderstruck.

"Ancel," said the archdeacon to him. "There is no doubt about it. Louis the Lusty will side with the episcopals. A conflict must be avoided at any price. Recommend the other Councilmen to redouble their prudence. I shall, on my part, endeavor to conjure off the storm that threatens."

"Come, my poor wife," said the Councilman, whose eyes were filling with tears! "Come! Woe is us, the King of the French is against us. May God protect the Commune of Laon!"

"As to me," answered Simonne, "upon the faith of a Picardian woman, I place my reliance upon the stout hearts of our communiers, upon the pikes, the hatchets and the swords in our hands!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GATHERING STORM.

Louis the Lusty had made his entry into the city of Laon on the eve of Holy Thursday of the year 1112. On the day following the arrival of the Prince, Colombaik, his mother and his wife were seated together in the basement chamber of their house. Dawn was about breaking. Fergan's son, Martine and Joan the Hunchback had watched all night. A lamp threw its light upon them. The two women, uneasy in the extreme, were stripping old linen into bandages and lint, while Colombaik, together with his three apprentices, plying their saws and planes, were actively engaged in fashioning pike-shafts, four feet long, of oak and ash branches recently lopped off. Colombaik did not seem to share the apprehension of his mother and his wife, who silently pursued their work, listening from time to time in the direction of the little window that opened on the street. They awaited, with as much impatience as anxiety, the return of Fergan, absent since the previous evening. What tidings would he bring?

"Lively, my lads," Colombaik was jovially saying to his apprentices, "ply your planes and your saws with despatch! It does not much matter if these pike-shafts be rough. They are to be used by hands as callous as our own. May there be a chance to use them!"

"Oh, master Colombaik," remarked one of the young apprentices laughing, "as to that, these handles will be less smooth to the touch than the fine doe skins that we tan for the embroidered gloves of the noble dames and their elegant young ladies."

"The ornament of a pike is its iron head," rejoined Colombaik; "but little Robin the Crumb-cracker, the apprentice of the

blacksmith, is long in fetching us those ornaments. However, with him it will not be as with the little apprentice of our friend the baker. There is no fear of Robin's nibbling at his goods on the way." The lads laughed at the joke of Colombaik. But accidentally turning his eyes in the direction of Joan and Martine, he was struck by the increasing uneasiness of their looks. "Good mother," said he to Joan in a tender and beseeching voice, "pardon me if I have saddened you with jokes that may be out of season at this time."

"Oh, my child," answered Joan, "if I look sad, it is not on account of your jokes, but the result of thoughts suggested by the sight of men shaping weapons, and women preparing lint for the wounded."

"And when we consider," put in Martine, unable to keep back her tears, "that a father, a son, a husband may happen to be among the wounded! Confound the people who brought war upon the city! Confound this clergy of the devil and their train of churchmen!"

"Dear Martine, and you, good mother," Colombaik rejoined, seeking to calm the two women, "to prepare for war is not to wage it. It is prudent to be on one's guard, just in order to secure peace, honorable peace."

"Your father! . . . Here is your father!" Joan cried out abruptly, hearing a rap at the street door. She rose, together with Martine, while one of the apprentices ran to open the door. But the expectation of the two women was not verified. They heard a childish voice cry out gleefully: "It burns! . . . It burns! . . . Who wants buns. . . It burns!" And Robin the Crumb-cracker, the blacksmith's apprentice, a lad about twelve years of age, wide awake, but all black with the smoke of the forge, stepped in, holding in his little leather apron about twenty pike-heads which he dropped on the floor. "Who wants fire-buns! . . . They are hot! . . . They just come from the furnace! . . ."

"Master Colombaik feared you had been nibbling the goods on the way," one of the young tanners observed with a laugh. "We hold you quite capable of doing so, little Robin!"

"You are right. I took my bite on the way!" laughingly answered the urchin. "But in order to chew my pretty piece of pointed iron, I need one of your fine ash branches. Let me have one."

"What the devil would you do with a pike?" asked Colombaik, smiling upon him. "You are barely twelve years old. That is no toy for urchins."

"I want to use it, if there be blows coming. My master, Paynen-Oste-Loup, will tap the backs of the great episcopals; so will I! I shall roll over the little noblemen in my best style. Those scamps have hurt my feelings quite often, pointing their finger at me and calling out: 'Look at the little villain with the black face! He looks like a blackamoor!'"

"Hold, my bold lad," said Colombaik to Robin; "here is a good oak handle for you. Give us the news. What is doing in the city?"

"They are rejoicing as on Christmas eve. Light is seen at all the windows. The forges are shooting up flame. The anvils ringing. They are making an infernal racket. One would think that the blacksmiths, locksmiths and armorers were all working at their master-pieces; and one would think all the shops are smithies."

"This time it is your father!" Joan cried out to her son, hearing a second rapping at the door. Fergan soon appeared. He entered at the moment when Robin was leaving, brandishing his oak branch and shouting: "Commune! Commune! Death to the episcopals!"

"Oh!" said the quarryman, following the blacksmith's apprentice with his eye. "How could we fear for our cause when even the children—"; and interrupting himself to address his

wife, who ran with Martine to meet him: "Come, now, dear bundles of timidity! The news makes for peace."

"Can it be true!" exclaimed the two women, folding their hands together. "There is to be no war?" And running to Colombaik, on whose neck she threw herself, Martine cried out: "Did you hear your father? There is to be no war! What happiness! It is over! Let's rejoice!"

"Upon my soul, dear Martine, so much the better!" remarked the young tanner, returning the embrace of his wife. "We shall not recoil before war, but peace is better. So, then, father, everything is adjusted? The bishop pays, or surrenders the horse? Justice will be enforced against that scamp of a Black John? And the King, true to his oath, backs the Commune against the bishop?"

"My friends," answered the quarryman, "we must, all the same, not hope for too much."

"But what about what you said just before," replied Joan with returning uneasiness, "did you not tell me the news was good?"

"I said, Joan, that the news was favorable to peace. Here is what happened last night: You heard the insolent answer of the bishop, reported at the meeting of the Councilmen by our neighbor Quatre-Mains, the baker, an answer that was rendered all the more threatening by the entry of the King into our city at the head of an armed troop of men. The Councilmen decided to take measures of resistance and safety. As constable of the militia, I ordered watchmen placed at all the towers that command the gates of the city, with orders to close them and allow none to enter. I likewise issued orders to the guilds of the blacksmiths, locksmiths and armorers to turn out quickly a large number of pikes, to the end of being able to arm all the male inhabitants. Quatre-Mains, like a man of foresight and good judgment, proposed sending under a good escort for all the flour in the mills of the suburbs, fearing the bishop may have

them pillaged by his men to starve out Laon. These precautions being taken, they were reported to the Council. We did not recoil before war, but did all we could to conjure it away. It was agreed that John Molrain was to appear before the King and pray him to induce the bishop to do us justice, and to promise henceforth to respect our charter. The Mayor went to the house of the Sire of Haut-Pourcin, where the King had taken quarters. Unable, however, to see the Prince, he conferred long with Abbot Peter de la Marche, one of the royal counselors, and showed him that we demanded nothing but what was just. The abbot did not conceal from John Molrain that the bishop, having ridden ahead with the King, had entertained him for a long time, and that Louis the Lusty seemed greatly irritated against the inhabitants of Laon. John Molrain had had dealings with the Abbot de la Marche on the confirmation of our Commune. Knowing the abbot's cupidity, he said to him: 'We are resolved to maintain our rights with arms, but before arriving at such extremities we desire to try all the means of conciliation. No sacrifice will be too great for us. Already have we paid Louis the Lusty a considerable sum to obtain his adhesion to our charter, let him deign to confirm it anew and to order the bishop to do us justice. We offer the King a sum equal to that which he received before. And to you, seigneur abbot, a handsome purse as a testimony of our gratitude."

"And attracted by such a promise," put in Colombaik, "the abbot surely accepted?"

"Without making any promises, the tonsured gentleman agreed to communicate our offer to the King when he retired, and he made an appointment with John Molrain for eleven in the evening. The Councilmen, having approved the proposition of the Mayor, went over the city, soliciting each of our friends to contribute according to his power towards the sum offered to the King. This last sacrifice was expected to roll away from our city the threatened dangers of war. All the inhabitants has-

tened to put in their quota. Those who had not enough money, gave some vessel of silver; women and young girls offered their trinkets and their collars; finally, towards evening, the sum or its equivalent in articles of gold and silver was deposited in the communal treasury. John Molrain returned to the King to hear his answer. The Abbot de la Marche informed the Mayor that the King did not seem indisposed to accept our propositions, but that he desired to wait till morning before taking a definite resolution. There is where matters now stand. In a hurry to make the rounds of our watchmen, and having no time to come here for money, I requested our good neighbor the baker to pay for us our share of the contribution. Colombaik shall take to Ancel the money he advanced for our family."

"Surely the King will accept the offer of the Councilmen," observed Joan, "what interest could he have in refusing to profit by so large a sum? He is a greedy prince. He will accept our money."

"What a wretched trader that Louis the Lusty is!" exclaimed Colombaik. "He has us pay him to confirm our charter, and he has us pay him a second time to re-confirm it. Patient people that we are! We must pay, and pay again!"

"What does it matter, my child," said Joan; "provided no blood flows, let us pay a double tribute, if necessary!"

"'It is with iron that tribute should be paid to kings,' said our ancestor Vortigern to that other tonsured representative sent by Louis the Pious," rejoined Colombaik, looking almost with regret at the iron pikes that his apprentices, who had not intermitted their work, were engaged upon. "Oh, those times are long gone by!"

"Fergan!" suddenly Joan called out, inclining her head towards the street; "listen! Is not that the bell, and the voice of a cryer. Let's find out what is up—"

At these words the quarryman's family approached the open window. The sun had just risen. A crier of the bishop, distin-

guishable by the arms embroidered on the breast of his coat, was seen passing the house. He alternately rang his bell and then cried out: "In the name of our seigneur the King! In the name of our seigneur the Bishop! Inhabitants of Laon assemble in the market-place at the eighth hour of the day!" and the crier rang anew his bell, the sound of which was soon lost in the distance. For an instant the family of the quarryman remained silent, each seeking to guess the object of the King and the bishop in ordering the assemblage. Joan, always yielding to hope, said to Fergan: "The King probably wishes to assemble the inhabitants in order to announce to them that he accepts the money and confirms the charter anew."

"If such was the intention of Louis the Lusty, if he had accepted the offer of the Commune, he would have notified the Mayor," the quarryman answered, sadly shaking his head.

"Perhaps he has done that. We may expect him to have done so, father."

"In that case the Mayor would have issued orders to ring the belfry bell, in order to assemble the communiers and announce to them the happy tidings. I do not like this convocation, made in the name of the King and the bishop. It presages nothing good. We have everything to fear from our enemies."

"Fergan!" replied Joan alarmed, "must we, then, renounce all hope of an accomodation? Is it war? Is it peace?"

"We shall soon be clear upon that. It will not be long before the eighth hour will sound," whereupon Fergan resumed his casque and his sword, which he had put away upon entering, and said to his son: "Arm yourself and let's go to the market-place. As to you, my young ones," said he, turning to the apprentices, "continue adjusting the pike-heads to the shafts."

"Fergan!" exclaimed Joan anxiously, "you foresee war?"

"Oh, Colombaik," said Martine, weeping and throwing herself upon the neck of her husband, "I die with fear, when I think of the dangers that you and your father are about to run!"

"Be comforted, dear wife, by ordering these preparations of resistance to continue, my father only adopts a measure of prudence," answered Colombaik. "The situation is not desperate."

"My dear Joan," the quarryman said sadly, "I have seen you bear up more bravely on the sands of Syria. Remember what perils you, your child and I escaped during our long journey in Palestine, and when we were serfs of Neroweg VI—"

"Fergan," Joan broke in, overcome with anguish, "the dangers of the past were terrible, and the future looks menacing."

"We were all so happy in this city!" muttered Martine. "Those wicked episcopals, so anxious to turn our joy into mourning, have, nevertheless, the same as the communiers, wives, mothers, sisters, daughters!'

"That is true," said Fergan bitterly; "but those men of the nobility and their families, driven by the pride of station and living in idleness, are furious at no longer being able to dispose of our hard labor. Oh! If they tire our patience and if they mean to reconquer their hateful rights, woe be unto the episcopals! Terrible reprisals await them!" And embracing Joan and Martine, the quarryman added: "Good-bye, wife; good-bye, my child."

"Good-bye, good mother; good-bye, Martine," Colombaik said in his turn, "I accompany my father to the market-place. Soon as we shall have definite information, I shall return to let you know. Remain at ease and without any apprehensions."

"Come, daughter," said Joan to Martine, after once more embracing her husband and her son, who forthwith went out, "let's resume our sad task. For a moment I had hoped we could drop it."

The two women began anew to prepare lint and bandages, while the young apprentices, resuming their work with renewed ardor, continued shafting the iron pikes.

CHAPTER VII.

"TO ARMS, COMMUNIERS!"

An ever increasing crowd flowed into the market-place. Not now, as on the previous day, did joy and the breath of security brighten the faces of men, women and children gathering to celebrate the inauguration of the communal Town Hall and belfry, the symbol of the emancipation of the inhabitants. No; neither women nor children assisted at this gathering, so different from the first. Only the men met, sombre, uneasy, some determined, others crestfallen, and all foreseeing the approach of a public danger. Assembled in large groups around the pillars of the market-place, the communiers discussed the latest tidings—not yet known by Fergan at the time when, in the company of his son, he left his house—significant and alarming tidings. The watchmen on the towers, between which one of the gates of the city opened on a promenade that extended between the ramparts and the episcopal palace, had seen a large troop of woodmen serfs and colliers, with Thiegaud, the bandit and favorite of Bishop Gaudry, march into the palace at daybreak. A short time after daybreak, the King, accompanied by his knights and men-at-arms, had also retired into the fortified dwelling of the prelate, leaving Laon by the south gate, which the sentinels had not dared to refuse to open to the royal cavalcade. The courtiers of the King having warned him that the inhabitants of the city had been up all night, and that the blacksmiths' and locksmiths' anvils had constantly rung under the hammer in the manufacture of a large number of pikes, such preparations of defence, such a nocturnal excitement, all so contrary to the peaceful habits of the townsmen, awoke the royal suspicions and fears,

and he had hastened to transfer his quarters to the episcopal palace, where he considered himself safer. Instructed on the departure of the Prince, the Mayor, John Molrain had himself run to the episcopal palace, where admission was refused him. Foreseeing as much, the Mayor had provided himself with a letter to the abbot counselor of the King, in which Molrain repeated his propositions of the previous day, and implored the King to accept them in the name of public peace. Molrain added that the Commune held the promised sum at the disposal of the King. To a letter so wisely framed and so conciliating, the King sent for answer that in the morning the inhabitants of Laon would be apprized of his pleasure. During that same night, it had been noticed in the city that the episcopals, entrenched in their fortified and solidly barricaded houses, had frequently exchanged signals among themselves by means of torches placed at their windows and alternately lighted and extinguished. These alarming tidings demolished almost completely the hope of an accommodation, and threw the communiers into a state of increasing anxiety. The Councilmen had been the first to appear at the market-place, where they were soon joined by the Mayor. The latter, grave and resolute, ordered silence, mounted one of the stands in the deserted stalls and said to the crowd:

"The eighth hour of the day will soon sound. I have ordered the messenger of the King to be allowed into the city when he presents himself at the gate. The King and the bishop have ordered us to meet here, at the market-place, to hear their pleasure. We prefer to receive the royal message at our Town Hall. That is the seat of our power. The more that power is contested from us, all the more zealous should we show ourselves in holding it high."

The Mayor's proposition was received with acclamation, and while the crowd followed the magistrates, Fergan and his son, commissioned to wait for the King's messengers, saw Archdeacon Anselm approaching with hurried steps. Thanks to his goodness and his uprightness, the prelate was beloved and venerated by all.

Making a sign to the quarryman to draw near, he said to him in an agitated voice: "Will you join me in an endeavor to avert the frightful misfortunes that this city is threatened with?"

"The King has not, then, been moved even by the last sacrifice that we imposed upon ourselves? He refused the offer of John Molrain?"

"The bishop, learning that the Mayor had offered the King a considerable sum for the re-confirmation of your charter, offered Louis the Lusty twice as much to abolish the Commune, and promised rich presents to the King's counselors."

"And the King gave ear to such an infamous auction sale?"

"He gave ear to the suggestions of his own cupidity. He listened to the counselors that surround him, and he accepted the bishop's offer."

"The oath that Louis the Lusty took, his signature, his seal affixed to our charter—all that is then nullified?"

"The bishop absolved the King of his oath, by virtue of his episcopal power of binding and unbinding here on earth. A sacredotal chicanery."

"The King is in error if he expects to receive the price of that infamous traffic. The treasure of the bishop is empty. How could the King, so astute a trader, rely upon the promises of Gaudry?"

"Once the bishop's seigniorial power is restored, he will clap upon the townsmen, who will have again become taxable and subject to any imposts at his mercy, a tax to pay the sum promised to the King, and the latter himself will lend armed assistance to the bishop to levy the new contributions."

"Fatality!" cried out Fergan in an outburst of rage. "We shall, accordingly, have paid to obtain our enfranchisement, and are to pay over again to fall back into servitude!"

"The projects of the bishop are as criminal as insane. But if you desire to ward off even greater dangers, you will try to allay the popular effervescence when the decision of the King shall be announced to the Councilmen."

"You advise a cowardly act! No, I shall not seek to pacify the people, when the insolent challenge shall have been thrown in their faces! You will hear me the first to cry out: 'Commune! Commune!' and I shall march at the head of my forces against the bishop. It will be a battle to the knife!"

"Will you promise me not to precipitate so bloody a solution, that I may make new efforts to lead the bishop back to more equitable sentiments?"

Anselm had hardly finished speaking when a man on horseback, preceded by a sergeant-at-arms, covered with iron and the visor of his casque up, appeared at the entrance of the street.

"Here is the royal messenger," said the quarryman to the archdeacon, advancing towards the two cavaliers; "if the resolution of the King and the bishop is such as you have just informed me of, let the blood that is to run fall upon them!" Addressing then the royal messenger:

"The Mayor and the Councilmen are awaiting you in the large reception room of the Town Hall of the Commune."

"Monseigneur the King and monseigneur the Bishop commanded the inhabitants to assemble here at the market-place, in order to hear the rescript that I bring," answered the messenger; "I must obey the orders given me."

"If you wish to fulfil your mission, follow me," replied the quarryman. "Our magistrates, representing the inhabitants of the city, are assembled at the Town Hall. They have not chosen to wait here." Fearing some trap, the King's messenger hesitated to follow Fergan, who, surmising his thoughts, added: "Fear nothing; your person will be respected; I answer for you with my head."

The sincerity that breathed through the words of Fergan reassured the envoy, who, from greater prudence, ordered the knight, by whom he was escorted, to accompany him no further, lest the sight of an armed man should irritate the crowd. The royal messenger then followed the quarryman.

"Fergan," the archdeacon called in a penetrating voice, "a

last time I conjure you, seek to curb the popular anger. I return to the King and the bishop to renew my endeavors against the fatal course they are starting on."

With that the archdeacon precipitately left the quarryman, who, leaving the market-place, reached the Town Hall, and stepping ahead of the messenger into the crowd repeated several times, while elbowing his way through: "Room and respect for the envoy; he is alone and unarmed!"

Arrived at the threshold of the Town Hall, the envoy left his horse in charge of Robin the Crumb-cracker, who pressed forward offering to guard the palfrey; and accompanied by the quarryman he went up to the large reception hall where were gathered the Mayor and the Councilmen, some in arms, others merely in the robes of their office. The faces of the magistrates were at once grave and uneasy. They misgave the approach of events disastrous to the city. Above the Mayor's seat stood the Communal banner; on a table before him, lay the official silver seal. The gathering was silent and wrapt in thought.

"Mayor and Councilmen! Here is the royal envoy who wishes to make a communication to you."

"We shall listen to him," answered the Mayor, John Molrain; "let him communicate to us the message he is charged with."

The King's man seemed embarrassed in the fulfillment of his errand. He drew from his breast a parchment scroll, sealed with the royal seal, and unfolding it he said in a tremulous voice: "This is the pleasure of our seigneur the King. He has ordered me to read this rescript to you aloud, and to leave it with you, to the end that you may not remain in ignorance upon its contents. Listen to it with respect."

"Read," said John Molrain; and turning to the Councilmen: "Above all, my friends, whatever our sentiments, let us not interrupt the envoy during the reading."

The King's man then read aloud:

"Louis, by the Grace of God, King of the French, to the Mayor and inhabitants of Laon, Greeting:—

"We order and command you strictly to render, without contradiction or delay, to our well-beloved and trusty Gaudry, Bishop of Laon, the keys of this city, which he holds under us. We likewise order and command you to forward to our well-beloved and trusty Gaudry, Bishop of the diocese of Laon, the seal, the banner and the treasury of the Commune, which we now declare abolished. The tower of the belfry and the Town Hall shall be demolished, within the space of one month at the longest. We order and command you, in addition, to henceforth obey the bans and orders of our well-beloved and trusty Gaudry, Bishop of Laon, the same as his predecessors and himself have always been obeyed before the establishment of the said Commune, because we may not fail to guarantee to our well-beloved and trusty bishops the possession of the seigniories and rights which they hold from God as ecclesiastics and from us as laymen.

"This is our will.

"LOUIS."

The recommendation of John Molrain was religiously observed. The King's envoy read his message in the midst of profound silence. In the measure, however, as he proceeded with the reading of the act, every word of which conveyed a threat and was an outrage, an iniquity, a perjury towards the Commune, the Mayor and Councilmen exchanged looks successively expressive of astonishment, rage, pain and consternation. Overwhelming, indeed, was the astonishment of the Councilmen, to whom Fergan had not yet had time to communicate his conversation with the archdeacon. However, aware of the evil intentions of the King, yet they had not been able to imagine such a flagrant violation of the rights that had been granted, acknowledged and solemnly sworn to by the Prince and the bishop. Great, indeed, was the anger that seized the Councilmen; the least bellicose among them felt his heart stirred with indignation at the insolent challenge hurled at the Commune, at the brazen robbery contemplated by the King and bishop in the attempt to restore their odious rights, the permanent abolition of which was proclaimed by a charter sold for heavy money. Great was also the pain felt by the Councilmen at the royal order to surrender to the bishop their banner, their seal and their treasury, and to tear down their Town Hall and its belfry. That belfry, that seal, that banner, such dear symbols of an emancipation ob-

tained after so many years of oppression, of servitude and of shame,—all were to be renounced by the communiers. They were to fall back under the yoke of Gaudry, when, in their legitimate pride, they expected to bequeathe to their children a freedom so painfully acquired. Tears of rage and despair rolled down from all eyes at the bare thought of such a disgrace. Great was the consternation of the Councilmen; even the more energetic of them, while caring little for their own lives, determined to defend the communal franchises unto death, nevertheless anticipated with profound pain the disasters that their flourishing city was threatened with, the torrents of blood that civil war was about to shed. Victory or defeat, what distress, what ravages, what a number of widows and orphans in prospect!

At that supreme moment, some of the Councilmen, they later admitted it themselves, after having first triumphed over a transitory feeling of faintness, felt their resolution waver. To enter into a struggle with a King of the French was, for the city of Laon, an act of almost insane foolhardiness. It was to expose the inhabitants to almost certain deeds of retribution. Moreover, these magistrates—all of them husbands and most of them fathers, men of peaceful habits—were not versed in war. Undoubtedly, to submit to bear the yoke of the bishop and of the nobility meant abysmal degradation; it meant to submit for all future time themselves and their descendants to indignities and incessant exploitation. Life, it is true, would be safe, and by virtue of tame submission to the bishop some concessions might be obtained to render life less miserable. Fortunately, the instances where such unworthy wavering in the face of peril was experienced, had the advantage of unrolling before the shaken hearts the abysmal infamy that fear might drive them to. Promptly returning to their senses, these men realized that the fatal choice was between degradation and servitude on the one side, and, on the other, the dangers of a resistance sacred as justice itself; that they had to choose between shame or a glorious death. Their self-respect soon regained the upperhand, and they

blushed at their own weakness. When the envoy of Louis the Lusty had finished reading the royal message, none of the Councilmen who had just been a prey to cruel perplexities raised the voice to advise the relinquishment of the franchises of the Commune.

The reading of the King's rescript being ended, John Molrain said to the envoy in a solemn voice: "Are you authorized to listen to our objections?"

"There is no room for objections to an act of the sovereign will of our seigneur the King, signed by his own hand and sealed with his own seal," answered the messenger. "The King commands in the fullness of his power; his subjects obey with humility. Bend your knees, bow down your foreheads!"

"Is the will of Louis the Lusty irrevocable?" resumed the Mayor.

"Irrevocable!" answered the envoy. "And as a first proof of your obedience to his orders, the King herein orders you, Councilmen, to hand over to me the keys, the seal and the banner of the city. I have orders to take them to the bishop, in token of submission to the abolition of the Commune."

These words of the messenger carried the exasperation of the Councilmen to its pitch. Some bounded from their seats or raised to heaven their threatening fists; others covered their faces in their hands. Threats, imprecations, moans, escaped from all lips. Dominating the tumult, John Molrain ordered silence. All the Councilmen resumed their seats. Then, rising full of dignity, calmness and firmness, the Mayor turned to the banner of the Commune, that stood behind his seat, pointed towards it with his hand and said to the messenger of the King: "On this banner, that the Kings commands us to give up like cowards, are traced two towers and a sword: The towers are the emblem of the city of Laon, the sword is the emblem of the Commune. Our duty is inscribed upon that banner—to defend with arms the franchises of our city. That seal, which the King demands as a token of relinquishment of our liberties," John Molrain

proceeded, taking up from the table a silver medal, "this seal represents a man raising his right hand to heaven in witness of the sacredness of his oath; in his left hand he holds a sword, with the point over his heart. This man is the Mayor of the Commune of Laon. This magistrate is swearing by heaven to rather die that betray his oath. Now, then, *I, Mayor of the Commune of Laon, freely elected by my fellow townsmen, I swear to maintain and to defend our rights and our franchises unto death!*"

"To that oath we shall all be faithful!" cried the Councilmen with frantic enthusiasm. "We swear sooner to die than to renounce our franchises!"

"You have heard the answer of the Mayor and Councilmen of Laon," said John Molrain to the King's man when the tumult was appeased. "Our charter has been sworn to and signed by the King and by Bishop Gaudry in the year 1109. We shall defend that charter with the sword. The King of the French is all-powerful in Gaul, the Commune of Laon is strong only in its rights and in the bravery of its inhabitants. It has done everything to avoid an impious war. It now awaits its enemies."

Hardly had John Molrain pronounced these last words when a deafening uproar rose outside the Town Hall. Colombaik had joined his father to accompany the royal messenger to the council hall. But after hearing the rescript of the King, he was not able longer to restrain his indignation. Hastily descending to the street, packed with a dense mass, he announced that the King abolished the Commune and re-established the bishop in the sovereignty of his so justly abhorred rights. While the news spread like wild-fire from mouth to mouth through the whole city, the crowd, massed upon the square, began to make the air resound with imprecations. The more exasperated communiers invaded the hall, where the council was gathered, and cried, inflamed with fury: "To arms! To arms! Down with the King, the bishop and the episcopals!"

Sufficiently uneasy before now, the royal messenger grew pale with fear, and ran for protection behind the Mayor and Councilmen, saying to them in a trembling voice: "I have only obeyed orders; protect me!"

"Fear nothing!" called Fergan. "I have answered for you with my head. I shall see you safe to the gates of the city."

"To arms!" cried John Molrain, addressing himself to the inhabitants who had invaded the hall. "Ring the belfry bell to convoke the people to the market-place. From there we shall march to the ramparts! To arms, communiers! To arms!"

These words of John Molrain caused the King's messenger to be forgotten. While several inhabitants climbed to the tower of the belfry to set the big bell ringing, others descended quickly to the street and spread themselves over the city crying: "To arms!" "Commune!" "Commune!" And these cries, taken up by the crowds, were soon joined by the clangor from the belfry.

"Molrain," Fergan said to the Mayor, "I shall accompany the envoy of Louis the Lusty to the city's gate that opens opposite the episcopal palace, and I shall remain on guard at that postern, one of the most important posts."

"Go," answered the Mayor; "we of the Council shall remain here in permanence to the end of deciding upon the measures to be taken."

Fergan and Colombaik descended from the council hall. The King's man walked between them. The people, running home for their arms, had cleared the square; only a few groups were left behind. Little Robin the Crumb-cracker, who had been charged with the care of the messenger's palfrey, had hastened to profit by the opportunity of straddling a horse for the first time in his life, and was carrying himself triumphantly in the saddle. At sight of the quarryman, he quickly came down again and said, while placing the reins into his hands: "Master Fergan, here is the horse; I prefer the infantry to the cavalry. I shall now run for my pike. Let the little episcopals look out. If I meet any, I'll massacre them."

The bellicose ardor of the stripling seemed to strike the royal envoy even more forcibly than anything he had yet seen. He remounted his horse escorted by Fergan and his son. The redoubled peals from the belfry resounded far into the distance. In all the streets that the King's man traversed on his way to the city gate, shops were hastily closing, and soon the faces of women and children appeared at the windows, following with anxious mien the husband, father, son or brother, who was leaving the house to meet in arms at the call of the belfry. The King's messenger, sombre and silent, could not conceal the astonishment and fear produced in him by the warlike excitement of that people of bourgeois and artisans, all running with enthusiasm to the defence of the Commune. "Before you arrived at the gate of the city," Fergan said to him, "you surely expected to meet here with a craven obedience to the orders of the King and the bishop. But you see it for yourself, here, as at Beauvais, as at Cambrai, as at Noyons, as at Ameins, the old Gallic blood is waking up after centuries of slavery. Report faithfully to Louis the Lusty and to Gaudry what you have witnessed while crossing the city. Perchance, at the supreme moment, they may recoil before the iniquity that they are contemplating, and they may yet save grave disasters to this city that asks but to be allowed to live peacefully and happy in the name of the faith that has been plighted."

"I have no authority in the councils of my seigneur the King," answered the envoy sadly, "but I swear in the name of God, I did not expect to see what I have seen, and hear what I have heard. I shall faithfully report it all to my master."

"The King of the French is all-powerful in Gaul, the city of Laon is strong only in its right and the bravery of its inhabitants. It now awaits its enemies! You see it is on its guard," added Fergan, pointing to a troop of bourgeois militia that had just occupied the ramparts contiguous to the gate by which the King's envoy made his exit.

CHAPTER VIII.

RETRIBUTION.

The episcopal palace, fortified with towers and thick walls, was separated from the city by a wide space, lined with trees and that served as a promenade. Fergan and his son were busy organizing the transport of materials destined for the defence of the walls in case of an attack, when the quarryman saw the outer gate of the episcopal palace thrown open. Several of the King's men came out, looked around cautiously, as if to make sure that the promenade was clear, re-entered the palace in hot haste, and almost immediately a strong escort of knights rode out, and took the road that led to the boundary of Picardy. This vanguard was closely followed by a few warriors, clad in brilliant armor, one of them, notable for his enormous stomach; two ordinary men could have been easily held in this one's cuirass. The rider's casque was topped with a golden crown engraved with fleur-de-lis. The long scarlet saddle-cloth, that covered his horse almost wholly, was likewise embroidered in gold fleur-de-lis. These insignias, coupled with the extraordinary corpulence of the rider, designated Louis the Lusty to Fergan. A few steps behind the Prince the quarryman recognized the messenger, whom, shortly before, he had himself accompanied to the gate of the city, and who, now was engaged in an animated conversation with the Abbot de la Marche. The train closed with several baggage mules and servants; the rear was brought up by another squad of knights. The whole cavalcade soon fell into a gallop, and Fergan saw the King at a distance turning towards the ramparts of Laon, whose belfry bell did not cease ringing, and menace the city with a gesture of rage by shaking at it his closed

fist, covered with a mailed gauntlet. Giving then the spurs to his horse, Louis the Lusty soon disappeared at the turning of the road in the midst of a cloud of dust.

"You flee before the insurgent communiers, oh, King of the Franks, noble descendant of Hugh Capet!" cried out Colombaik in the passionate heat of his age. "Old Gaul is waking up! The descendants of the kings of the conquest flee before the popular uprisings! The day predicted by Victoria has arrived!"

Ripened with age and experience, Fergan said to his son in a grave and melancholic voice: "My son, let us not take the first glimmerings of the approaching dawn for the light of the mid-day sun." At that very moment, the sound of the great bell of the cathedral, never rung but at certain great holidays, was suddenly heard. Instead, however, of ringing slowly and in measured ryhthm, as usual, its clang now was alternately rapid and then again at long intervals. The tolling lasted only a short time; soon the bell was silent. "To arms!" Fergan cried out in a thundering voice. "This must be a signal agreed upon between the knights of the city and the episcopal palace. While waiting for the re-inforcements that, undoubtedly, the King is gone after, the episcopals deem themselves able to overcome us. To arms! Cover the ramparts! Death to the episcopals!"

At the call of Fergan and his son, the latter of whom ran to rally the insurgents, the communiers hastened near, some armed with bows, others with pikes, hatchets and swords—all ready to repel an attack. Others again lighted fires under caldrons full of pitch, while their companions rolled with great effort towards the ramparts certain engines of war, which, by means of turning pallets, fastened in the middle of a twisted rope, hurled enormous stones more than a hundred paces off. Suddenly a great noise, in which shouts were mixed with the clatter of arms, sounded from afar in the center of the city. As Fergan had forseen, the episcopals sallying forth from their fortified dwellings at the signal given by the great bell of the cathedral, had fallen upon the bourgeois in the city at the same time that, as

agreed upon, the serfs of the episcopal palace, led by several knights, were to begin the seige of the ramparts. The communiers were, accordingly, to find themselves between two enemies, one within, the other without. In fact, Fergan saw the gate of the episcopal palace swing open once more, and there issued forth from it a huge four-wheeled wagon, pushed from behind with feet and hands. The wagon was filled with straw and faggots, heaped so high, that the mass of combustibles, raised twelve or fifteen feet above the rails of the wagon, completely hid and covered those who shoved it, serving them as a shelter against the projectiles that might be hurled at them from the walls. The assailants figured upon setting fire to the combustibles in the wagon, with the object of pushing it near enough to the gate so as to communicate its fire to the latter. The move, although skilfully planned, was baffled by the quick wit of Robin the Crumb-cracker, the blacksmith's apprentice. Armed with his pike, he was one of the first at the ramparts, and had noticed the chariot advancing slowly and always pushed from behind. Several insurgents, armed with bows, yielded to a thoughtless impulse, and hastened to shoot their arrows at the wagon. These, however, fastened themselves uselessly in the straw or the wood. Robin pulled off his shirt, tore it in shreds, and sighting a tall militiaman, who, seducted by the example of his fellows was also about to shoot uselessly upon the straw, the blacksmith's apprentice brusquely disarmed the townsman, seized the arrow, wrapped it in one of the shreds of his shirt, ran and plunged it into a caldron of pitch, already liquid, lighted it at the fire, and quickly placing it on the cord of the bow, fired the flaming arrow into the middle of the chariot filled with combustibles, and then but a short distance from the walls. Overjoyed at his own inspiration, Robin clapped his hands, turned somersaults, and while returning the bow to the astonished militiaman, set up the shout: "Commune! Commune! The episcopals prepare the bonfires,

the communiers light them!" And the blacksmith's apprentice ran to pick up his pike.

Hardly had the firebrand dropped upon that load of straw and fagots than it took fire, and offered to the eyes one mass of flames, overtopped by a dense cloud of smoke that the wind drove towards the episcopal palace. Noticing the circumstance, Fergan hastened to profit by it. "My friends!" cried he, "let's finish the work begun by little Crumb-cracker! That cloud of smoke will mask our movements from the episcopals. Let's make a sortie. Form into a column of armed men, and let's take the episcopal palace by storm. Death to the episcopals!"

"Fall to!" was the insurgents' response. "To the assault! Commune! Commune!"

"One-half of our troops will remain here with Colombaik to guard the walls," Fergan proceeded. "They are fighting in the village. The episcopals might try to attack the ramparts from behind. Let those follow me who are ready to storm the episcopal palace. Forward, march!"

A large number of communiers hastened upon the heels of Fergan. Among them was Bertrand, the son of Bernard des Bruyeres, the ill-starred victim of Gaudry's murderous nature. Bertrand was silent, almost impassible in the midst of the seething effervescence of the people. His only thought was to avoid dropping his heavy axe that weighed down his shoulder. Fergan had cleverly led the sortie of the insurgents. Masked for a sufficient space of time to the eyes of the enemy by the flames and smoke of the burning wagon and its load, they soon reached the walls of the episcopal palace, found the gate open, and a crowd of armed serfs standing under the arch. Under the lead of several knights, they were preparing to march on the assault of the postern, their chief, as well as Fergan, having relied upon masking their attack behind the burning chariot. At the unexpected sight of the insurgents, the episcopals only thought of barring the entrance to the palace. It was too late. A bloody hand-to-hand encounter took place under the arch that joined

the two towers on either side of the gate. The communiers, warming to the conflict, fought with fury. Many were killed, others wounded. Fergan received from a knight a blow with an axe that broke his casque and struck his forehead. After a stubborn struggle, the inhabitants of Laon threw the episcopals back and entered the vast yard where the combat proceeded with redoubled fury. Fergan, still in the hottest of the fight, despite his wound, for a moment thought himself and his men lost. Just as the fight was at its hottest, Thiegaud came in from the green of the bishopric at the head of a large body of woodmen serfs, armed with stout hatchets, and threw himself into the fray. The re-inforcement was intended to crush the insurgents. What was not the surprise of these, when they heard the serf of St. Vincent and his men set up the cry: "Death to the bishop! To the sack of the palace! To the sack! Commune!"

The combat changed its aspect on the spot. The larger number of the bishop's serfs who had taken part in the struggle, hearing the woodmen cry: "Commune! Death to the bishop! To the sack of the palace!" dropped their arms. Deserted by a part of their men, the knights redoubled their efforts of valor, but in vain; they were all killed or disabled. Soon masters of the palace, the insurgents spread in all directions, yelling: "Death to the bishop!"

Thiegaud approached Fergan with a mien of triumphant hatred brandishing his cutlass. "I answered Gaudry for the faithfulness of the woodmen of the abbey," cried the serf of St. Vincent, "but in order to revenge myself upon the wretch for having debauched my daughter, I caused our men to mutiny against him and his tonsured fellow devils!"

"Where is the bishop?" the insurgents shouted, brandishing their weapons. "To death with him!"

"Friends, your vengeance shall be satisfied, and mine also. Gaudry will not escape us," replied Thiegaud. "I know where the holy man lies in hiding. The moment you forced the gate of the palace, and fearing the issue of the fight, Gaudry put on

the coat of one of the servants, in the hope of fleeing under cover of the disguise. But I advised him to lock himself up in his storeroom, and to crawl into the bottom of one of the empty hogsheads. Come, come!" he proceeded with savage laughter, "We shall stave in the head and draw red wine." Saying which, the serf of St. Vincent, followed by the mob of the insurgents who were exasperated at the bishop, wended his way to the storeroom. Among the furious crowd was the son of Bernard des Bruyeres. Having by the merest chance escaped unscathed from the melée, the frail youth marched close behind Thiegaud, endeavoring, despite the smallness of his stature and his feebleness, not to lose the post he had taken. His pale and sickly features were rapidly regaining their color; a feverish ardor illumined his eyes and imparted to him fictitious strength. No longer did his heavy battle axe seem to weigh on his puny arm. From time to time he lovingly contemplated the weapon, while he passed his finger along its sharp edge. At such times he would emit a sigh of repressed joy, while he raised his flashing eyes to heaven. Guiding the communiers, the serf of St. Vincent, threaded his way to the storeroom, a spacious chamber located at one of the corners of the first yard. Before reaching it, the inhabitants of Laon, having stumbled against the corpse of Black John that lay riddled with wounds, they threw themselves in a paroxysm of fury upon the lifeless body of the savage executor of Gaudry's cruelties. In the tumult that ensued upon these acts of reprisal, the son of Bernard des Bruyeres was, despite all stubborn resistance on his part, separated from Thiegaud, at the moment when the latter, helped by several of the insurgents, broke down and forced the door of the storeroom, that, for greater precaution, the prelate had bolted and barred from within. The mass emptied itself into the vast chamber that was barely lighted by narrow skylights and crowded with full and empty vats. A kind of alley wound its way between the numerous hogsheads. Thiegaud made a sign to the insurgents to halt and stay at a distance. Wishing to prolong the bishop's agony, he struck with

the flat of his cutlass the head of several vats, calling out each time: "Anyone inside?" Of course he received no answer. Arriving finally near a huge hogshead that stood on end he turned his head to the communiers with the slyness of a wolf, and removing and throwing down the cover that had been lightly placed upon it, asked again: "Any one inside?"

"There is here an unhappy prisoner," came from the trembling voice of the bishop. "Have mercy upon him in the name of Christ!"

"Oho! my friend Ysengrin!" said Thiegaud, now taking his turn in giving the nickname to his master. "Is it you who are cowering down in that barrel? Come out! Come out! I want to see whether, perhaps, my daughter is there in hiding with you." Saying which, the serf of St. Vincent seized the prelate by his long hair with a vigorous clutch, and forced him, despite his resistance, to rise by little and little from the bottom of the ton into which he had crawled. It was a frightful spectacle. For a moment, always holding the bishop by the hair as the latter rose on his feet in the barrel, Thiegaud seemed to hold in his hand the head of a corpse, so livid was Gaudry's face. For a moment Gaudry stood upon his legs inside of the barrel, with his head and shoulders above the edge. But his limbs shook so that, wishing to support himself inside of the barrel, it tumbled over and the Bishop of Laon rolled at the feet of the serf. Stooping down, while the prelate was painfully trying to rise, Thiegaud affected to look into the bottom of the barrel, and cried out: "No, friend Ysengrin, my daughter is not there. The jade must have stayed in your bed."

"Beloved sons in Jesus Christ!" stammered Gaudry, who, upon his knees, extended his hands towards the communiers. "I swear to you upon the gospels and upon my eternal salvation, I shall uphold your Commune! Have pity upon me!"

"Liar, renegate!" yelled back the enraged communiers. "We know what your oath is worth. Swindler and hypocrite!"

"You shall pay with your life for the blood of our people that has flowed to-day! Justice! Justice!"

"Yes, justice and vengeance in the name of the women, who this morning had husbands, and this evening are widows!"

"Justice and vengeance in the name of the children, who this morning had fathers, and this evening are orphans!"

"Oh, Gaudry, you and yours have by dint of perjuries and untold outrages tired the patience of the people! Your hour has sounded!"

"Which of us is it that wanted war, you or we? Did you listen to our prayers? Did you have pity for the peace of our city? No! Well, then, neither shall there be pity for you! Death to the bishop!"

"My good friends . . . grant me my life," repeated the bishop, whose teeth chattered with terror. "Oh! I pray you! . . . Grant me my life! I . . . I shall renounce the bishopric . . . I shall leave this city . . . You shall never see my face again . . . Only leave me my life!"

"Did you show mercy to my brother Gerhard, whose eyes were put out by your orders?" cried a communier, seizing the prelate by the collar and shaking him with fury. "Infamous criminal! Did you have pity for him?"

"Did you have mercy for my friend Robert of the Mill, who was stabbed to death by Black John?" added another insurgent. And the two accusers seized the prelate, who quietly allowed himself to be dragged upon his knees, "You shall die in the face of the sun that has witnessed your crimes!"

Overwhelmed with blows and insults, Gaudry was pushed out of the storeroom. In vain did he cry: "Have pity upon me! . . . I shall restore your Commune! . . . I swear to you! . . . I swear!—"

"Will you restore their husbands to the widows, their fathers to the orphans you have made?"

"After having lived the life of a traitor and a homicide; after exasperating an inoffensive people that only asked to be allowed

to live in peace in accordance with the pledge that was sworn, it is not enough to cry 'Pity!' in order to be absolved."

"Clemency is holy, but impunity is impious! Death to the bishop!"

"Heaven and earth!" cried Fergan. "The justice of the people is the justice of God! Death to the bishop! Death!"

"Yes, yes! To death with the bishop!"

The prelate was dragged in the midst of these furious cries outside of the storeroom. Suddenly a tremulous voice dominated the uproar: "What, shall not the son of Bernard des Bruyeres be allowed to avenge his father!" Immediately, by a simultaneous movement, the insurgents opened a path to the son of the victim. His face radiant, his eyes flashing, Bertrand rushed upon the prostrate bishop, and raising his heavy axe with his weak hands, cleaved the skull of Gaudry; then, casting off the blood-stained weapon, he cried: "You are avenged, my father!"

"Well done, my lad! The death of your father and the dishonor of my daughter are avenged at one blow!" cried Thiegaud; and seeing the episcopal ring on the bishop's finger, he added: "I take my daughter's token of marriage!" Unable, however, to tear the ring off the prelate's finger, the serf of St. Vincent cut it off with a blow of his cutlass and stuck both finger and ring in his pocket.

So legitimate was the hatred that Gaudry inspired the communiers, that it survived even the man's death. His corpse was riddled with wounds and covered with curses. The insurgents were in the act of throwing his lifeless body into a sewer close to the storeroom, when from another side the cry fell upon their ears: "Commune! Commune! Death to the episcopals!"

CHAPTER IX.

RESTING ON THEIR ARMS.

While this tragic scene was enacting, another body of the people of Laon, led by Ancel Quatre-Mains and his sprightly wife, invaded the episcopal palace from another side. Fergan was running to meet them the moment he saw them enter the green, when he caught sight of Archdeacon Anselm, who, having so far kept aloof from the theater of the conflict, was now hastening to the spot, informed of the bishop's fate by one of his domestics. The archdeacon succeeded in inducing the communiers to refrain from submitting the remains of their enemy to the idle and last disgrace contemplated by them. Helped by two servants, the worthy priest of Christ was carrying the corpse of the bishop, when he noticed Fergan, and said to him in a voice deeply moved, with the tears running down his cheeks: "I wish to bury the body of this unfortunate man, and to pray for him. My sad forecasts have been verified. Only yesterday, warning him in the midst of his braggart and fatal illusion of security, I expressed the hope that I may not soon have to pray over his grave. Oh, Fergan, civil war is a terrible scourge!"

"A curse upon those who provoke these execrable strifes, that carry mourning into the camp of both the vanquishers and the vanquished!" answered the quarryman, and leaving the archdeacon to fulfil his pious office, he proceeded to join Quatre-Mains, who commanded the other troop of the invaders.

The worthy Councilman, ever hampered and incommoded by his military equipment, had rid himself of it in the moment of battle. Replacing his iron casque with a woolen cap and keeping on his leather jerkin only, with his coat sleeves rolled back, as

he was wont when kneading his dough, he had armed himself with the poker of his oven, a long and heavy iron implement, bent at one end. His stout-hearted little wife Simonne, her cheeks in a glow and her eyes aflame, carried in her skirt a bundle of lint and bandages ready for use, together with a wicker-covered flask, containing a decoction, pronounced marvelous by her for checking the flow of blood. Joy and the excitement of triumph radiated from the charming features of the baker's wife. At the sight of Fergan, however, whose face was clotted with the blood of the wound he had received on his head, she cried out sadly: "Neighbor Fergan, you are wounded! Let me tend you, the fight is over; be not alarmed about your son; we have just seen him at his post on the ramparts; he is safe and sound, although there was a sharp encounter at that spot; sit down on this bench, I shall nurse you the same as I would have done Ancel, had he been wounded. Upon the faith of a Picardian woman, if he escaped being hurt, it was not his fault; he merited anew his surname of Quatre-Mains, the way he belabored the heads and backs of the episcopals."

Fergan accepted Simonne's offer and sat down upon a bench, while the young woman looked for the lint in her pockets. The baker himself stopped a few steps behind to gather the details of the capture of the bishop. He then approached his wife, and seeing her engaged upon Fergan, hastened his steps, asking with deep interest: "What, neighbor, wounded? Nothing serious?"

"I was struck with an axe on my casque," and raising his head which he had inclined to facilitate the nursing of Simonne, Fergan noticed the rather unmilitary accoutrement of his friend: "Why did you take off your armor in the middle of the fight?"

"Upon my faith, the casque kept dropping on my nose, the corselet took the breath from me, the sword encumbered my legs. Accordingly, when the fight started, I made myself comfortable, just as I do when I am kneading dough. I rolled up my sleeves, and instead of that devil of a sword, which I cannot handle, I

armed myself with my iron poker, the use of which is familiar to me."

"But what could you do with a poker? It is a rather singular implement of war."

"What could he do with it?" put in Simonne, saturating a bandage with the contents of the wicker-covered flask, and applying the same to the quarryman's wound. "Oh, Ancel is quick with his hands. If a nobleman on horseback came near, armed to the teeth, my husband grappled his throat with the hook of his long poker and then pulled with all his might; I helped when necessary. In almost every instance we unhorsed the knight, and throwing him to the ground he was at our mercy."

"After which," added the baker calmly, "and after beating my man with the hook of my poker, I despatched him with the handle. I settled more than one of them. One does what he can!"

"Oh, neighbor!" Simonne proceeded with enthusiasm; "it was especially at the siege of the house of the knight of Haut-Pourcin that Ancel made a famous use of his poker. Several episcopals and their servants, entrenched upon a crenelated terrace, fired down upon us with cross-bows. They had killed or wounded so many communiers, that none dared come near the accursed house, and our people had retired to the end of the street. Presently, we saw the wicked knight of Haut-Pourcin, cross-bow in hand, leaning half over the battlement of the terrace, to see if there was any of ours that he could hit. At that instant—," but interrupting herself, Simonne said to her husband: "Tell your own story, Ancel; while I speak I cannot pay proper attention to the bandage of our neighbor."

While Simonne finished attending to Fergan, the baker continued the narrative that his wife had commenced: "Noticing that the knight of Haut-Pourcin leaned over the terrace several times, I profited by a moment when he had withdrawn; I slided along the wall to the foot of the house; as the projection of the balcony prevented him from seeing me, I watched for my man;

the instant he again put out his head I snatched him up with the hook of my poker exactly at the jointure of his casque and his cuirass with might and main; Simonne came and helped; and we had the satisfaction of making that noble personage turn a somersault from the height of the terrace down to the street; our communiers ran by; the episcopals rushed out of the knight's house to deliver him; they were driven back and we stormed the building!"

"And lo!" cried Simonne heroically, "I, who did not leave the heels of Ancel, find myself face to face with that old hag of the dame of Haut-Pourcin, who was yelling like a fury: 'Kill! Kill! No quarter for those vile clowns! Exterminate them!' I was seized with rage, and recalling the insults that the harpy had poured upon me shortly before I threw her down, grabbed her by the throat, and, as true as Ancel is called Quatre-Mains, I slapped her face as thoroughly as if I was endowed with six hands, all the while saying to her: 'Take this! and that! you proud dame of Haut-Pourcin. Take this, and that, and still another, you wicked old hag! Oh, my gallants pay for my skirts, do they! Very well, I pay cash, and in round sums for the insults I receive!' Upon the faith of a Picardian woman, had her hair not been gray, like my mother's, I would have strangled the she-devil!"

Fergan could not help smiling at the exaltation of Simonne. He then said to Ancel: "When I heard the large bell of the cathedral ringing in a peculiar way, I concluded it was the signal agreed upon between the bishop and his partisans to attack our people simultaneously from within and from without the city."

"You were not mistaken, neighbor. At that signal, the episcopals, who had laid their plans and gathered their forces over night, sallied forth from their houses crying: 'Kill, kill the communiers!' Other noblemen also were besieged in their houses. The fight was going on with the same vigor on the streets and squares, while a troop of episcopals betook itself to the ramparts on the side of the bishop's gate."

"Expecting to fall from the rear upon our people who they thought were being attacked in front," said Fergan. "For that reason I ordered my son to be on his guard. You assure me he is not wounded? God be praised!"

"If he is wounded, neighbor Fergan," replied Simonne, "it can only be slightly. He called out to us from the top of the ramparts: 'Victory! Victory! Our people are masters of the bishop's palace!'"

"And now," said Quatre-Mains, "meseems the Mayor and Councilmen should meet at the Town Hall to consider what is to be done."

"I think so, too, Ancel. We shall leave here a sufficient force to keep the palace. Watch shall continue to be held on the ramparts of the city, whose gates shall be closed and barricaded. Let's not deceive ourselves. However legitimate our insurrection, we must be prepared to see Louis the Lusty return to lay siege to the city at the head of the re-inforcements that he has gone to fetch. The Princes are on the side of the clergy."

"I think so, too," replied the Councilman with resignation and fortitude: "John Molrain said to the royal messenger: 'The King of the French is all-powerful in Gaul; the Commune of Laon is strong only in its right and the courage of its inhabitants.' We shall fight as well as we may against Louis the Lusty and his army; and we shall, if need be, be killed to the last man."

"Thank you for your kind nursing, good neighbor," Fergan said to Simonne; "I now feel in good trim. My poor Joan will be jealous."

"It is rather I who should be jealous," retorted Simonne. "Crossing our street, we saw the basement room of your house full of wounded men, at whom your wife and Martine were busy. The good souls!"

"Dear souls! How uneasy they must feel!" said Fergan. "I must hasten to ease their minds, and I shall return to superintend our defence."

The conversation between Fergan and Ancel was here interrupted by cries and shouts mingled with cheers that went up from one of the yards of the palace, which was given up to pillage and devastation. The insurgents sought vengeance not only for the perjury of Gaudry, but also for the odious exactions and cruelties that they had suffered before the establishment of the Commune. Some, staving in the vats in the storeroom, were getting drunk on the bishop's precious wines, a rich tithe, once collected by him on the vineyards of the villeins; others, making a heap of the tapestry and furniture which they dragged from his rooms into the yard, set fire to the pile; finally, and it was the shouts of these last that reached the quarryman and the baker, yet others, seizing the sacredotal robes and insignia of the prelate, organized themselves into a grotesque procession, of which little Robin the Crumb-cracker was the hero. The blacksmith's apprentice, carrying on his head the episcopal mitre that almost completely hid his face, and robed in a cape of gold cloth that trailed at his heels, held in his hands a vermillion cross studded with precious stones. He scattered to the right and left grotesque benedictions, while the communiers, now half drunk, as well as the bishop's serfs, who, after the fight had joined the vanquishers, sang at the top of their voices a parody of church hymns, interspersed ever and anon with cheers of "Long live Robin the Crumb-cracker!"

Leaving these rolicking youngsters to amuse themselves at their pleasure on the bishop's premises, Fergan and his neighbors betook themselves to the city. Night was approaching. Bidding good-bye to the baker and his wife and requesting them to hasten ahead of him to his house and set Joan and Martine's minds at ease, Fergan mounted the rampart to meet his son. The latter, considering it prudent to keep watch, even after the victory of the day, was busy with the measures for the night. At sight of his father with his head bandaged, Colombaik uttered a cry of alarm, but soon was set at ease by Fergan. After providing for additional measures of security, both returned home.

Night had set in. Everywhere the fight had long ended. The communiers were collecting their dead and wounded by the light of torches. Women, bathed in tears, ran to the places where the fight had been hottest, and looked for a father, a husband, a son, or a brother, in the midst of the corpses that the streets were strewn with. At other places, exasperated at the chiefs of the episcopal party, the communiers were demolishing their fortified houses. Finally, at a distance, a brilliant gleam crimsoned the sky, and cast its reflection hither and thither on the gables of the taller houses. It was the glare of a conflagration. The fire was devouring the dwelling of the bishop's treasurer, one of the most execrated of the episcopals. Neither did the cathedral of Laon escape the avenging torch of the insurgents.

"Never, my child, blot this terrible spectacle from your memory. Such are the fruits of civil war," said Fergan to his son, stopping in the middle of the Exchange square, one of the most elevated spots of the city, and whence the burning cathedral could be seen at a distance. "Look at the flames of the conflagration that is devouring the cathedral; hark to the sound of the seigniorial towers crashing down under the hammer blows of the communiers; listen to the moaning of yonder children, now become orphans, of their mothers, now become widows; contemplate these wounded men, these bleeding corpses carried away by their relatives and by friends in tears; behold at this hour, everywhere in the city, mourning, consternation, vengeance, disaster, fire and death! Then recall the happy and peaceful aspect that this same city offered only yesterday, when the people, in the fullness of their joy, inaugurated the symbol of their enfranchisement, bought, agreed and sworn to by our oppressors! It was a beautiful day. How our hearts leaped at every peal from our belfry! How all eyes shown with pride at the sight of our communal banner! All of us, bourgeois and artisans, rejoicing in the present and confident of the future, wished to continue to live under a charter sworn to by the nobles, the bishop and the King. But it happened that nobles, bishop and King, hav-

ing dissipated the money with which we paid for our franchises, said to themselves: 'What does a signature or an oath matter; we are powerful and numerous; we are used to wielding the lance and the sword; those artisans and bourgeois, vile clowns all, will flee before us. To horse, noble episcopals, to horse! High the sword! High the lance! Kill, massacre the communiers!' "

"But the communiers made the King of the French take to his heels, and have exterminated the knights!" cried Colombaik with enthusiasm. "The son of one of the victims of that infamous bishop cleaved his skull in two with a blow of his axe! The cathedral is on fire, and the seigniorial towers are crumbling down! Such is the price of perjury! Such is the terrible and just chastisement of the people who unchained the furies of war against this city, so tranquil but yester night! Oh, let the blood that has been shed fall upon the criminals! Their turn has come to tremble! Old Gaul is waking up after six centuries of torpor! The day of the rule of might and clerical chicanery is over! The hour of deliverance has sounded!——"

"Not yet, my son!"

"What! The King is fleeing; the bishop killed; the episcopals exterminated or in hiding; the city ours!"

"Have you given a thought to the morrow?"

"The morrow? We shall preserve our conquest, or shall fight other battles, equally victorious!"

"No illusions, dear boy! Louis the Lusty fled before an insurrection that he did not think himself equal to cope with. But ere long he will be back to the walls of Laon with considerable forces, and he will then dictate his will."

"We shall resist unto death!"

"I know, that despite all our heroism, we shall succumb in the fray."

"What! These franchises, paid for with our good money and now sealed with our blood,—shall they be torn from us? Are our children to fall back under the abhorred yoke of the lay and

ecclesiastical seigneurs? Oh, father, are we to despair of the future?"

"To despair? Never! Thanks to the communal insurrections, that were provoked by the feudal atrocities, our worst days are over. The legitimate and terrible reprisals of Noyon, Cambrai, Ameins and Beauvais, just as these fresh ones of Laon, will inspire the seigneurs with a wholesome fear. These holy insurrections have proved to our masters that the 'clowns, artisans and bourgeois' will no longer allow themselves to be taxed at mercy, robbed, tortured and killed with impunity. Our darkest days are over. But our descendants will still have bloody battles to fight before the arrival of the radiant day predicted by Victoria the Great!"

"And yet all has gone our way on this day."

"Rely upon my experience and foresight. Louis the Lusty will presently return at the head of redoubtable forces. The death of this infamous Gaudry, just though it was, will unchain against our city the fury of the clericals. The bolts of excommunication will second the royal arms. We are bound to go down—not before the excommunication; people laugh at that—but under the blows of the soldiers of Louis the Lusty. Our bravest men will be killed in battle, banished or executed after the King's victory. Another bishop will be imposed upon the city of Laon. Our belfry will be torn down, our seal will be broken, our banner torn and our treasury pilfered. The episcopals, supported by the King, will take vengeance for their defeat. Torrents of blood will flow in the city. That's what's before us."

"Then all is lost!"

"Child," proceeded Fergan with a melancholy smile, "men are killed; the principle of freedom never, after it has once penetrated the popular heart. Will Louis the Lusty, the new bishop, the nobles, however cruel their vengeance may be, massacre all the inhabitants of Laon? No. They are bound to leave alive the larger part of the communiers, if for no other purpose than to have whom to levy taxes on. The mothers, sisters, wives, the

children of those who will have died for liberty, will continue to live. Oh, no doubt, for a while, the terror will be intense; the recollection of the disasters, of the massacres, of the banishments, and of the executions that will have followed upon the struggle, will at first paralyze all thought of insurrection. But none of that will last."

"Accordingly, the new bishop and the nobles will redouble their audacity? Their oppression will become more frightful than before?"

"No, the new bishop, however insensate he may be, will never forget the terrible fate of Gaudry; the nobles will not forget the death of so many of their people, who fell under the blows of the people's justice. That valuable example will be useful to us. The first thirst for vengeance on the part of the episcopals, once slaked, they will ease the yoke out of fear for new revolts. Nor is that all. Those of us who will have survived the struggle, will gradually forget those evil days and recall the happy ones when the Commune, free, peaceful, flourishing, exempt from all crushing imposts, and wisely governed by a magistracy of its own choice, was the pride and bulwark of its inhabitants. Those who will have witnessed those happy days will speak of them to their children with enthusiasm. They will tell their little ones how one day the King and the bishop having leagued themselves against the Commune, the latter valliantly rose in arms, forced Louis the Lusty to flee, and exterminated the bishop and his episcopals. The glory of the triumph will cause the disaster of the subsequent defeat to be forgotten. The feeling will take hold of revenging the overthrow of the Commune by restoring it. By little and little the enthusiasm will gain ground, and, when the moment shall have come, the insurrection will break out anew. Just reprisals will once more be exercised against our enemies, and our franchises will be proclaimed again. Mayhaps that again that second step towards freedom is followed by a savage re-action. But the step will have been taken. Some franchises will continue in force. And thus, step by step, painfully, by dint

of struggles, of courage, of perseverance, our descendants, alternately vanquishers and vanquished, halting at times after battle to tend their wounded and recover breath, but never retreating an inch, will in the course of time arrive at the goal of that laborious and bloody journey. Then will the radiant sun of the day of Gaul's enfranchisement rise in all its glory!"

"Oh, father," said Colombaik, overpowered with sorrow, "woe is us, if Victoria's prediction is not to be verified, according to her prophetic visions, but across heaps of ruins and torrents of blood!"

"Do you imagine freedom is gained without struggle? We are the vanquishers. Our cause is holy like justice, sacred like right. And yet, look around!" answered the quarryman, pointing his son to the dismal spectacle presented by Exchange square, encumbered with the dead and dying, and lighted by the glamor of the torches and the lingering gleams of the fire of the Cathedral. "Look around, what streams of blood, what heaps of ruins!"

"Oh, why this terrible fatality!" resumed Colombaik in tones almost of despair. "Why must the conquest of such legitimate rights cost so dear!"

"The insurrection of the communal bourgeois is but the symptom of an enfranchisement, universal, but still far away. That day of deliverance will arrive, but it will arrive only when all the oppressed in city and field will rise in a body against their masters. Yes, that great day will come . . . it may take centuries . . . but I shall at least have caught the glamour of its dawn . . . and I shall die happy!"

EPILOGUE.

Two months after the victory of the Commune of Laon over its seigniorial suzerain, the Bishop of Laon, and its episcopals, Fergan the Quarryman died on the ramparts of the city, defending them against the troops of Louis the Lusty. The quarryman's apprehensions had been verified, fully and promptly.

The day after the victory the Mayor, Councilmen and several other leading citizens, convened to consider the dangers of the situation. An attack by Louis the Lusty was expected any moment, nor did any give themselves up to illusions concerning the issue. Left to fight the King single-handed, the citizens of Laon realized that they would be crushed. They decided to seek an ally. One of the most powerful seigneurs of Picardy, Thomas, seigneur of the castle of Marle, known for his bravery, as well as for his ferocity, in which he equalled Neroweg VI., was a personal enemy of the King. Shortly before, in 1108, he had leagued himself with Guy, seigneur of Rochefort, and several other knights, to prevent the King's being consecrated at Rheims. Despite the iniquitous character of Thomas de Marle, and against the advice of Fergan, the Commune of Laon, pressed by danger, made propositions to that seigneur, who was known to have a large force at his command, for an alliance against the King. Thomas de Marle, unwilling to affront the royal power, refused to declare war against the King, but consented, in consideration of a money payment, to receive on his lands all the communiers who stood in fear of the royal vengeance.

A considerable number of insurgents, foreseeing the consequences of a struggle with the King, accepted the offer of Thomas de Marle, and, carrying their valuables with them, left Laon with wife and children. Others, Fergan among them, preferred staying in the city and defending themselves against the King

unto death. Although the number of the communiers was reduced by the migrations to the surrounding regions, nevertheless, generous and credulous, the remaining inhabitants of Laon had entered into the pacific overtures of the surviving episcopals, who were laboring under the demoralizing effect of their recent defeat. Soon, however, as the latter realized how greatly the ranks of the communiers were thinned by death, and, above all, by the migrations, they picked up courage. They ordered the serfs of the abbey to meet in the market-place on a given day, and, taking them in command, fell upon the communiers in their own houses. Whoever fell into their hands was put to the sword. Thus, civil war broke out afresh. The serfs pillaged and set on fire all the houses of the bourgeois that they succeeded in capturing. Fergan and Joan, Colombaik and Martine, together with the apprentices of the tanner, entrenched themselves in their house, which, happily fortified, enabled them to sustain victoriously more than one siege to which they were subjected.

During these internal disturbances that decimated still further the ranks of the remaining communiers, Louis the Lusty was busily engaged gathering his forces. Learning that Thomas de Marle was giving asylum on his domains to the inhabitants of Laon, the King first marched against him, ravaged his lands, beseiged him in his fortress of Couchy, took him prisoner, and mulcted him with a heavy ransom. As to the people of Laon, found within the territory of Thomas de Marle, the King had them all sabred or hanged, and their bodies long served as pasture to the birds of brey. A rich butcher of Laon, Robert the Eater, was tied to the tail of a fiery horse, and died the frightful death of the Queen Brunhild, five hundred years before. Through with these bloody executions, Louis the Lusty marched upon Laon. The Mayor and Councilmen, faithful to their oaths of defending the Commune with their lives, ran to the ramparts, together with Fergan, Colombaik and several others of the citizens, to oppose the entrance of the King. At the last battle a large number of the communiers fell on the field, dead or wound-

ed. Fergan was killed, Colombaik was wounded in two places. The defeat of the communiers was inevitable.

The King took the city and placed a new bishop in the seigniory.. But here also the forecast of Fergan proved correct. Thanks to the remembrance of the insurrection and of the just reprisals of the insurgents, the exorbitant privileges of the bishop and noblemen were modified.

Colombaik was not allowed to taste these limited sweets of the heroic defence of Laon. Himself and others, among whom were the Mayor and the Councilmen, too deeply compromised in the insurrection, were banished from the place, and all their property confiscated. But young and full of life as well as of hope for the future and of pride at the past, though ruined, the quarryman's son settled down with his mother and wife, and resumed his trade as a tanner at Toulouse in Languedoc, where, thanks to the local advantages of industry and intelligence, commerce then flourished and, at that season, thought enjoyed freedom.

(The End.)

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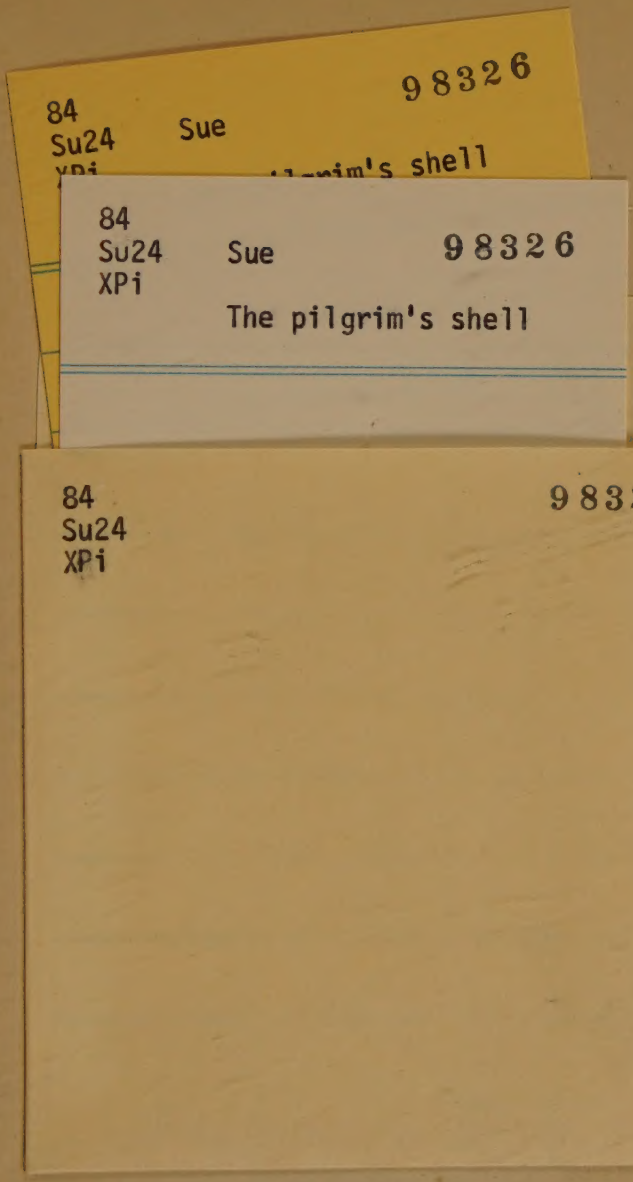
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